

“Who Do You Say that I Am?”

*Spiritual Exercises of the University Students
of Communion and Liberation
Rimini, December 2010*

INTRODUCTION – JULIÁN CARRÓN
December 10th, evening

We have arrived here, each one of us aware of our own inability to reach the fullness that we all desire. For this reason, when one acknowledges being so needy, a beggar, the most fitting thing to do is to entreat, to ask: nothing corresponds more when life urges. Who do we entreat? We pray to that energy, more powerful than our own—capable of changing our life for us—that we call the Holy Spirit: that He may invest our whole being, our whole life so that we can know by experience the marvelous fulfillment He can allow us to reach.

Come Holy Spirit

Welcome, everyone! A special greeting—in addition to our friend Wael, who has arrived from Egypt at our invitation to give a testimony about what struck him, what he saw in us that could have caused him to drag so many people to do what they did in Cairo—to those who have come from abroad, from Belgium, France, Ireland, Holland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, and even Uganda.

What has moved us to come here, if not the same hope that He has evoked in us? Nothing else would have been able to move our life, to make us go through the difficulty of getting here, if not something that, at least in the beginning, like at dawn, was awakened in us by what we have seen and experienced or by what we have glimpsed in someone else; so much so that, in the face of the toil of living, we begin to perceive that someone else has something that we still are unable to discover, but in which we glimpse a hope for ourselves.

For this reason, I welcome each of you, asking you to be loyal to that something that moved in each of us, because already at the beginning, this

first loyalty is needed to give Him space, and see the fulfillment of the promise, the hope that He has evoked.

Thus, the word that defines the beginning of a gesture like ours is this expectant awaiting, sparked in us by what we have glimpsed in someone else. In order to verify whether He is able to fulfill this promise, we mustn't censure anything, mustn't erase anything of the toil or the difficulties we live with, because we all arrive here with life that urges within us, as one of you writes: "There are days when everything seems of little interest and everything is irritating, even I who am restless, thus little disposed to stay with what I have to do. I would like to tell you how in these recent weeks there has emerged in me, at times almost violently, the need to encounter a presence that is alive, that is real. Everything seems heavy and disappointing to me, even the relationships that are a special gift, and I can hide this from myself for days, thinking that the sadness or heaviness I sense are casual, momentary; or silencing myself with thoughts like, "Today, it's this way; tomorrow, it will be different." In the end, they don't allow me to live. In these moments, all the desire and the melancholy of those precise moments of my history when life finally wasn't casual, press urgently within me, that is, the moments when I perceived I was loved, when I could be myself, and thus could move within reality with a personality (not like a more or less affable or nice or cute ghost). For me, encountering Christ coincides with the beginning of having hope. Who Christ is for me: recently, I have understood that this is the most decisive point. But what is that Something other that does not fade like the autumn leaves, does not decay like a man who dies, that challenges time, that even becomes more beautiful with time, that endures and makes me endure so? I understand I need to experience something that makes me live; otherwise, everything, even my boyfriend, even my dearest friends, in the end bore me and leave me with a bitter taste in my mouth."

This kind of loyalty with your own experience is needed in order to begin to focus on life, because life urges in the daily things. As when a father dies and a young person finds himself with a grave illness: "There are two facts, at first impact tragic and contrary to the desire for happiness I have always built for myself. I suddenly found myself disarmed and stripped of all my magnificent ideas. I say 'magnificent' because until you find yourself having to grapple with life, you just build castles in the air. But this nakedness has turned out to be the truest and greatest instrument that binds me to He who gives me life, moment by moment. I have never felt so forcefully and overwhelmingly this desire for life that manifests

itself daily with the death of my father and the need to have four injections a day. When we become fully aware of our fragility, our impotence in the face of our limitations, then it is easier to discover that only Christ can respond to our desire for life, embracing us with or without illness. Feeling needy of Him: this is the point at which life is worth living, because it drives us continually to ask Who we exist for, Who we live for, and Who constantly creates us."

And a friend, responding to the theme of our Exercises, tells us about all her unease: "I have to say that the title of the Exercises made me rather uneasy. 'Who do you say that I am?' This question, I have to say in all sincerity, without hiding my shame, seemed obvious in the beginning. It's obvious that Christ is the reason I get up in the morning, participate actively in university life, serve as student representative, sing in the choir, go to meetings, study, spend time with my friends or my boyfriend. What need is there to answer? It's an uncomfortable question, one I answer with an obvious response: Christ is the meaning of my life. The true problem is that I never really asked myself such a question. I'm shaken up by the way you've been able to hit the raw nerve, or better, to pull me out of the fog in which I experience this question. For me it would have been much simpler if you had proposed a title about the heart or reason; I could have rambled on and on, but such a point-blank question disconcerted me, above all because Christ Himself is the one asking me. Ever since Marta died, her testimony has stuck in me like a thorn, small but bothersome. "I am You who make me." She lived this awareness and this relationship, and she was happy. Recently, I have realized that I am truly determined, not, as I thought, by my encounter with the Movement and with the charism of Fr. Giussani, but by what the world thinks. What determines me, thus, is being or not being capable, even in CL, succeeding, saying the right things, being exactly how the powers that be want me: a life based on the nothingness of my thoughts and a continuous lament about a constant lassitude. Thank you, because the Exercises' title was enough to reopen all the drama of my life."

We come here without needing to hide any wounds, as another person says: "I want to bring my wound there, leave it open, let the fact that I am total need become a judgment that enables me to always keep my eyes and my heart wide open."

Each of us can recognize the modality with which life urges us from within; during these days, we want to immerse ourselves in His presence so we can respond adequately to this question.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us, while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith.”² We can look at everything because we are surrounded by this cloud of witnesses; two, in particular, have been granted to us recently.

One is our Marta, mentioned before, our friend who died a few months ago, who—as we all read in the dialogue she had with her father—was determined to be the object of the infinite love of One who loved us. She encouraged us, ‘Look, look at what you have! Live! Look at all of reality; you don’t need elaborate lines of reasoning. Look, it’s like when you make pizza, you have the dough in your hands. To be happy, you need to love Him more than everything, above all things, and this makes you love everything, more intensely. I love everything, everything of my life.’ And we know that she said these things not when she was well, but almost at the end, when this illness was prevailing! You don’t say these things just to say them. “A friend is like the zoom adjustment on a camera: she focuses, focuses, that is, she helps you cast light where there is truth, but the whole relationship is yours and that’s enough, yours with Him, and that’s enough, nobody different, not you—the friend—and Him; she’s yours and that’s enough. You are you who asks, you are you who entreats, you are you who cries out, you are you who asks Him: love me!” How each of us would desire to be with our whole self before the question: “And you, who do you say that I am?” starting from experience and not just simply having heard about it!

Or our friend Manuela of the *Memores Domini*, who served in the Papal household; her death was the occasion for Benedict to tell us about the importance of her witness. “I find great support in thinking of the words that form the name of her community: *Memores Domini*. In meditating on these words, on their meaning, I find a sense of peace, because they recall a profound relationship that is stronger than death. *Memores Domini* means ‘those who remember the Lord,’ namely, people who live in remembrance of God and of Jesus, and in this daily remembrance, full of faith and love, find the meaning of all things, of small actions and likewise of important decisions, of work, of study, of brotherhood. Remembrance of the Lord fills the heart with deep joy as an ancient hymn of the Church says: ‘*Iesu dulcis memoria, dans vera cordia gaudia*’ (‘Sweet memory of Jesus that gives true heartfelt joy’). So for this reason the thought that Manuela is a *Memor Domini*, a person who lives in

remembrance of the Lord, brings me peace. This relationship with Him is deeper than the abyss of death. It is a bond that nothing and no one can break, as St. Paul says: ‘[Nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (*Rom 8:39*). Yes, if we remember the Lord, it is because He first remembers us with the love of a Parent, of a Brother, of a Friend, also at the moment of our death. Although it can at times seem that He is absent at that moment, that He has forgotten us, in reality we are ever present to Him, we are in His Heart. Wherever we fall, we fall into His hands. Precisely where no one can accompany us, God, our Life, waits for us.”³

In the company of these witnesses, we can look at everything without censuring anything, even death. And what must we do, then, but keep our gaze fixed on Christ? “This is conversion: to turn around (in Latin, it is precisely *converti*), to ‘pay attention to’ something or someone by whom we feel interpellated. Turn around, like Zacchaeus, and immerse ourselves in His presence. Or, like the centurion, who sent a messenger to Jesus to ask Him to save his sick servant. Then, knowing that Jesus was on His way, he sent his servants to meet Him on the way and tell Him, ‘Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy to have You enter under my roof. Therefore, I did not consider myself worthy to come to You; but say the word and let my servant be healed. For I too am a person subject to authority, with soldiers subject to me. And I say to one, “Go,” and he goes; and to another, “Come here,” and he comes; and to my slave, “Do this,” and he does it. When Jesus heard this, He was amazed.’ (cf. *Lk 7:1-10*). When the centurion saw Jesus, when the Samaritan was looked at and described in detail, and when the adulteress heard Him say, ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go, [and] from now on do not sin any more’ (*Jn 8:11*), when John and Andrew saw that face look at them attentively and speak to them, it was an immersion in His presence. Immersing ourselves in the presence of Christ who gives us His justice, looking at Him, this is the conversion that changes us at the root, that is to say, that leaves us forgiven. It’s enough to look at Him again, it’s enough to think of Him again, and we’re forgiven.”⁴

For Zacchaeus, the adulteress, the centurion, each with his or her own need, when they were immersed in His presence, in His embrace, life began to ferment. We are here, friends, to be able to participate in the newness He made present in history, to let ourselves be struck by His presence, to let ourselves be embraced, to let ourselves be looked at, because our thoughts or our feeling are not what change us: it is immersing ourselves

in that Presence that we do not create, that we are not capable of generating; it is the collision with a diversity that has embraced us all. Let's pray to be able to let ourselves be invaded by this Presence. May He make each of us willing to leave that opening without which He cannot enter, because He does not want to force anyone's freedom. Only if we let ourselves be immersed in this Presence can we respond seriously to the question, "Who do you say I am?"

Therefore, in these days, we ask of ourselves a simple but decisive thing: silence. In order to explain what silence is, I always start from the experience we have all had in a few moments of life. Have you ever had the experience of being before something that left you speechless? Silence is born this way, not as an order ("You must not speak!"); it is the surprise of something that is so awesome that it leaves me speechless, like Giovanni and Andrea, like when you look at your boyfriend and you are there, mute, before the sight of that tenderness full of affection. Christian silence is born of a Presence, of being before Someone who amazes us so much that we're left speechless. Therefore, silence is not an anguishing void, to flee from as soon as possible because we can't stand it. Our silence is different; it is a silence born of His Presence, a full silence, a silence we cannot do without if we don't want to lose the intensity of that moment. It is the space given to this You when it appears in life and dominates. It is a You that dominates the silence and, if I don't give Him space, the You disappears—without silence, the You isn't there. If you don't need to observe silence, it is because you haven't encountered any You. It is not because of an organizational or moralistic problem or an intention: it is in order not to lose the relationship with this You. And what sacrifice is required to let ourselves be entirely determined by this Presence, not to observe the superficial appearance of silence such that the next second one is already distracted. Silence and sacrifice are like the test for verifying whether or not something has happened to us that is worth giving everything for. Let's help each other, friends! Let's demonstrate our friendship in these days, that is, that we truly care for the good of the other, the happiness of the other, witnessing to each other this tension toward His Presence.

LESSON – JULIÁN CARRÓN
December 11th, morning

1. The historical context: a challenge and an opportunity

"Who do you say I am?" We live our faith in history, and can't ignore the context in which we live it, because it is within this context that we can see what newness it introduces, in such a way that we can answer this question with abundant reasons, facts, and signs.

We are in a situation of travail, difficulty, crisis, as Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco said; we are jammed "while the country appears stunned, and looks disorientedly."⁵ It's as if this situation found us more disarmed. Surprisingly, the 2010 report by CENSIS, an Italian institute of socio-economic research, identified the nature of the crisis in Italy as a drop in desire that manifests itself in every aspect of life: we have less will to build, grow, and seek happiness. The responsibility for this fact is to be attributed to "evident individual and mass display of fragility, for behaviors and attitudes that are lost, indifferent, cynical, passively adaptive, prisoners of media influences, condemned to the present without the possibility of going deeper into the collective memory and into the future."⁶

How can it be that, having reached such important objectives in the past, we find before ourselves a society so marked by emptiness (that touches everyone)? All this shows us that the crisis is indeed social, economic, and political, but above all anthropological, because it concerns the very concept of the person, of the nature of her desire and her relationship with reality. As we say in the flyer entitled "The forces that change history are the same as those that change man's heart," "We were under the illusion that the desire would stay alive by itself or even that it would become more alive in the new situation of attained welfare. Experience shows us, instead, that desire can become flat"—you know this well already at your age—"if it doesn't find an object equal to its needs" and "we find ourselves all "sated and desperate."⁷

"When desire flattens out, the bewilderment of the young and the cynicism of the adults begins."⁸ These were the words of Fr. Giussani in 1987, in Assago, twenty-three years ago! And then, with the famous image of Chernobyl, he explained that, as after a nuclear explosion, everything can seem the same in the "organism" but it undergoes a flattening of desire, an incapacity to adhere, a lack of energy. Now, years later, everyone is saying what Fr. Giussani prophetically foresaw, the

sociological studies are saying it, and for this reason “The CENSIS report hits the bull’s eye again when it identifies the real urgency of this historical moment: “Starting to desire again is the necessary civil virtue to stimulate a too satisfied and flattened society.”⁹

But the question is, “Who or what can reawaken desire? This is the cultural problem of our era,”¹⁰ and all those who want to take seriously our need must deal with this urgency. Associations, political parties, teachers: we all face the identical question and a sociological or ideological answer will no longer suffice, because we have seen the failure of all the projects. In fact, they were incapable of keeping desire alive. We must offer our witness to an experience capable of keeping it alive, and the Church, too, will have to show that her claim to having something more to offer people can reawaken the person; she must show that “Christ is so present that He is able to reawaken the person—and therefore all of his desires—to the point of not totally depending on the historical circumstances.”¹¹

In this situation in which we find ourselves living our faith, what is the instrument for returning to desire? What, don’t you remember? Fr. Giussani said years ago, “Without acknowledgment of the Mystery present, the night advances, confusion advances and—as such, on the level of freedom—rebellion advances, or disappointment so overflows the measure that is it as if we didn’t expect anything anymore, and lived without desiring anything anymore, except the furtive satisfaction or the furtive answer to a brief request.”¹² All our attempts are insufficient for keeping alive our expectant awaiting, all our desire: the only possibility is acknowledging the Mystery present, that is, acknowledging what has happened to us as something so real that it reawakens us continually, as we are incapable of giving ourselves the energy for constantly restarting.

For us, who have glimpsed and encountered Him, what keeps us from acknowledging the Mystery present? Here we see the influence of the cultural context in which we live, as we said at the Opening Day, quoting the Pope, who constantly reminds us: we live in a context dominated by relativism. They would like us to believe that when the Pope asserts that relativism “threatens to sap the very foundations of our society”¹³ it’s a matter of his lucubrations. Then, instead, reality documents that he is right!

Relativism is the loss of the capacity to know truth, to find in it definitive freedom and fulfillment of the most profound human hopes. But we were created to know the truth, for the fulfillment of our being, for happiness, and yet it is as if, with the loss of this capacity, we cannot adhere,

and thus we are prey to widespread sentimentalism, which is like the other face of what Benedict XVI calls “relativism.” The void of knowledge subjects life to the dictatorship of feelings, and uncertainty hands over the rudder of existence to our moods. We all know what life becomes when it is guided simply by feelings. We all suffer the consequence: generalized instability, absolute fluctuation, grave fragility. This way of living is not true; it is a lie. We all see the insufficiency of this stance on life, and can recognize it in many ways. Above all, we realize that we always desire more, and this means that we are made for the truth and are able to acknowledge when we find it and when we don’t find it. This is hardly relativism! We have the detector, the heart, which enables us to say: this way of living fulfills me, makes me travel a road; instead, the other makes me increasingly confused and, like a floating mine, I’m at the mercy of my moods.

Why is it interesting to look at this context? Because this cultural climate affects us much more than we realize, in the way we live the faith, that is, the most decisive thing that has happened in our lives. And it isn’t that this situation doesn’t concern us who have encountered Christ. You document it in the many contributions you’ve sent in preparation for these days in Rimini. In recent years, we have always said that faith is a method of knowledge that enables us to reach certainty; but we see how we toil to live faith this way, we see the travail that we continually have to face in order to live it as knowledge, and how often, instead, there prevails a way of living it that contains truly little knowledge.

This is seen in many signs. For example, if I can’t manage to know truly, if faith is not a true knowledge, I return to images. My images prevail over true knowledge. One of you wrote me, “I have seen an Other operate, but it seems that something is still missing because, in the long term, as the days pass, I forget what I’ve seen and my worries go back to being the center of my day, nothing else. Thus, whole days pass without thinking of Him the way John and Andrew thought of Him, the way I myself at times have found myself thinking of Him: present, in the carnal sense, as a companion. It seems to me that the problem has more to do with the fact that many times I substitute my boyfriend, mother, father, friends, an image of mine, my expectations, ideas, or mental framework for the presence of an Other. It isn’t that I have never known, but too often it happens that I begin to shape what I met according to my mental framework. I found this piece in *Is It Possible to Live This Way?* (in the assembly on hope): ‘The Apostles also were hoping for something else, they were hoping that Jesus would finally bring the Kingdom of Israel, the Kingdom of the Hebrew

people, to dominate the world and their ministries of this world but, even if they had the mentality of everyone with these image, there was an attachment to Jesus that was sharper than these images to which they had remained faithful. This was so true that when the risen Jesus encounters them for the first time, they say: “Master, so now You’ll establish the Kingdom of Israel?” as if He weren’t dead, as if nothing had happened; they follow the mentality of everyone else. And Jesus quietly says: “It’s not like that! The time of these events is known only by the Father.” And they are so childlike near Jesus, they let it drop; they don’t hold to the demand that He answer their questions just as they may have imagined, but they remain attached to Him more deeply than they were attached to their opinions, with a greater simplicity.¹⁴ This is the struggle. In part I understand this returning to being a child, but I feel the urgent need for it to become more and more my way of being, my approach to life, because otherwise the content of the word ‘Christ’ is only an idea of mine. If Christ is an idea of mine, then any image of fulfillment prevails, like it does with everyone. I decided to come study in a city because I believed it was necessary to have a bit of the intellectual academic prestige this city enjoys, but realistically I was moved by a desire for power; my aspiration was to have everything under control and to look down on everyone from a higher step. Arriving in this city, I met some of our people. What happened to me? I am moved like a baby in realizing how this saved me from these images. I had yielded. A life building an image for myself, a set of armor to help me face life.”

If nothing else happens, the image of prestige prevails, or one seeks fulfillment in affective relationships, as another person recounts: “After the earthquake that struck my land, I had a boyfriend for a year and a half. In the beginning, everything went well, and I thought, ‘After all, what more could a twenty-two year old girl want? A tranquil relationship, in which the maximum expression corresponds to sentiment, having fun, satisfaction of this or that.’ The solitude I felt after what happened brought me to think that the relationship was the solution to all my problems. A year and a half ago, I thought that all my desire could be concretized in that relationship, which seemed to be the answer to everything. A colossal crash: all my expectations were crushed. I wondered how it could be possible: he loved me, it’s not that he didn’t treat me well, he showered me with attention, we had compatible characters, but it didn’t work, it wasn’t enough, I wasn’t happy because the common way of living the relationship deep down didn’t satisfy me. Where was the mistake? I gave myself a thousand

answers: maybe I desired too much, I had to settle for less, I’m the one who’s mistaken. But it got worse and worse. I lived intimacy with him in the common way of perceiving the relationship between a young man and a young woman, but instead of perceiving it as the crowning moment of our relationship, I felt that I loved him less. A great desire to love the other was born in me, but I realized I wasn’t able to love him, so I wanted to understand what it meant to truly love. I looked at some of my friends in the Movement and I desired a relationship like theirs, but just desiring it wasn’t sufficient because I was convinced that it was all fruit of my own capacity, of the luck of finding someone who corresponded to me in everything. And where was my work? I realized what it meant to sacrifice. Sacrificing the immediate reaction was something that wounded me incredibly because I’m not able to, yet this is what I desire.” A person may not be able to do it, but that doesn’t mean that she doesn’t desire it.

As you see, if faith is not a true knowledge, images prevail. Why? Because we’re made for fulfillment, for happiness, and if we don’t find it, we can’t help imagining it in one way or another, stumbling about seeking it.

Other times, sentimentalism prevails, and we see how a struggle is established between that desire for knowledge and feeling. Listen to this friend, “I need the relationship with Him to become more and more a relationship of knowledge so I can live each moment in the certainty that He exists and that I am a relationship with Him. Last night, I read the message the Pope sent for Manuela’s funeral, in which he said, ‘Yes, if we remember the Lord, it is because He first remembers us...’ We are *Memores Domini* because He is *Memor nostri*; He always remembers us. ‘Although it can at times seem that He is absent at that moment, that He has forgotten us, in reality we are ever present to Him, we are in His Heart. Wherever we fall, we fall into His hands.’ I desire this self-awareness that the Pope has been so untiringly witnessing to us about, that you are testifying to me continually, because I see that there are only two possibilities: either I am determined by the fact that I am His, or I am continually a slave to the feeling I experience at the moment, pouring all my hopes of liberation into a form I’ve pre-established, denying in this way the experience I’ve had during these months. The last two weeks were a continuous struggle between these two positions, until I yielded to the experience I’ve had.”

You see the influence of our context by the fact that under it all, we have the concept that the event happens intermittently: yesterday, yes; today, no. At the root, feeling predominates: yesterday, I felt Him and thus, He was there; today, I don’t feel Him and thus—we talk this way, as if it were

patently clear—thus, He doesn't exist. We are in relativism, on the seesaw of emotions; everything depends on what we feel, as if Christianity did not speak of a real Presence, independent from us, but of something that our feeling causes to exist.

For this reason, a further signal is that we often think we have to sustain faith, like Atlas with the world on his shoulders. "You have to believe," as if it were a titanic effort, being unable to recognize something that makes us certain, and therefore lets us rest. When we know something with certainty, we don't have to sustain it: it's there, that's all. But since I don't know Him, it's as if I made Him exist because I affirm Him, as if it were a matter of my creative ability, and this tires us, exhausts us, and, at a certain point, we quit.

All this tells us how the context in which we live influences what has happened to us, the way we live the faith, apparently on a seesaw, that does not allow life to fulfill itself. This is why Saint Paul's question arises: "Who will deliver me from this mortal body?"¹⁵ And we return to the words we said in Morning Prayer: "But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.' Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you. See, upon the palms of my hands I have written your name; your walls are ever before me."¹⁶

So then, the crisis, the travail in which we find ourselves are the opportunity for knowing the truth of these words. Not outside, not in another context, not returning to another, more tranquil period in history: it is here, now, that we can travel a road of knowledge that enables us to reach a certainty that can truly build life.

But how does one get out of this situation I've described? Not just with a more correct doctrine, with an opposite ideological position, nor just in force of an experienced and admitted unease; something else is needed. One can leave this relativism, this sentimentalism only in the experience of an encounter, encountering something truly different from me. This is the decisive question, in which Christianity shows its diversity compared to all the rest. This is the only possibility: the encounter with a Presence so truly present that it grasps our "I," our being, and enables us to live an adherence so real, so powerful that we no longer depend on our images, no longer depend on our moods, and no longer succumb constantly to this titanic effort of thinking we have to create Him, but that, on the contrary, we rest in Him.

2. The contemporaneity of Christ

What is the victory over relativism and sentimentalism? Let's image the situation John and Andrew found themselves in when their encounter with Jesus happened, because that is the canon and paradigm of this victory. They certainly didn't live in an easy situation: doctors of the law, Pharisees, Sadducees, zealots, doomsayers, John the Baptist. One heck of a pluralistic society! How were they saved? What happened that pulled them out of this confusion? Having the capacity, like everyone has, to know the truth, they found something to which their person was attracted like a magnet, so much did it correspond to their desire to live, to their desire for happiness. "The first chapter of St John's Gospel documents the very simple and profound manner in which Christianity emerged in history: the happening of a human event, the encounter with an exceptional presence. For John and Andrew, Christianity, i.e., the fulfillment of the Law, the fulfillment of the ancient promise in whose hope the faithful remnant of the Hebrew people (Anna, the prophetess, Simeon, the shepherds, all described in the first chapters of St Luke) had lived, the Messiah, the One who was to come and for whom the people were waiting, was a man standing right before their eyes. They had come across Him, they had followed Him, they had gone to His home and spent the whole afternoon there with Him, filled with astonishment, open-mouthed, watching Him speak."¹⁷

This is why Fr. Giussani always told us that the criterion for acknowledging Christianity will always be this very simple modality, the most fitting for our fragility, our incapacity, easy. Why was it easy for John and Andrew to recognize Him? Because they were before a fact that was so objective, a Presence so exceptional that all their reason, their capacity for knowledge, their freedom, their affection was finally completely drawn by His objective presence (not imaginative, objective!), of which we can have an "analogous shadow" in the experience of falling in love.¹⁸ I see a presence outside of me, not imagined by me, that draws my whole "I" like a magnet, and thus is easy to recognize: the more exceptional it is, the easier it is to recognize. And so then, one changes the religious method: instead of a titanic effort, it is resting before a Presence that fills us. They were so convinced that from that moment on, even erring time after time, they became increasingly more His, and this is confirmed in the shared life they began with Him: they couldn't help but seek Him, and slowly they came to a certainty that allowed them a knowledge that was finally full, so real that they couldn't avoid the question, "But who are You?" And so He made

them definitively protagonists with the counter-question, “But who do you say I am? Starting from the experience you have with Me, who do you—you!—say I am?”

And for us, now, is this experience possible? Is it just a memory of the past? Must we settle simply for an historical re-evocation, that deep down does not influence the situation in history we’ve just described? That it happens now as then, we see it, friends, every day in ourselves or in others: “A girl in the second year became close to some of our people, struck by the way they studied together in the library. She began studying with them every day, having lunch with them at the university, going out in the evening, scrupulously avoiding all the moments of prayer because she didn’t believe in God. I hardly know her, but one evening during a dinner, while I was talking about what happened to me that afternoon doing charitable work, I couldn’t help noticing her eyes wide open as they scrutinized me [the same word Fr. Giussani used to describe John and Andrew, two thousand years ago: eyes wide open]. After a while, I got up to get dessert and she promptly followed me to tell me, ‘You people have messed up my life [*you*, not an imagination, not a feeling: *you*, a real presence, carnal]. The way you live isn’t normal. I hate you, because for twenty years they had me believe that you have to settle for less, and I had learned to stay afloat. But since I have met you, I can’t stop the question in my head: what if there were something more? I also learned to keep the things of my life clearly separate, each in its drawer, but you’re blowing all this away and it makes me hate you because I don’t know who I am anymore. But I’ve never felt so alive.” This is the question. In this situation that CENSIS describes, in this flattening, something can happen to her that, even if she hates them, can make her so alive now—not two thousand years ago, now!—because the point of departure of the faith is always the same, it is objective, commanding, and unmistakable: something outside of us, that we cannot reduce. This is the greatness of Christianity. Don’t think that the Mystery was incompetent in choosing this method: He chose a method that we, with all our ability, cannot manipulate; it is there in front of us, and cannot be reduced to our feeling, our mood, our image, or our ability.

Here is another witness: “I want to tell you that in this recent period I have been quite surprised to see a growing number of new faces attracted to us day after day. They have very different stories, but one thing in common: they say they’re so drawn to us because there’s something strange and beautiful among us, a different way of living that fascinates them,

something that goes beyond differences of language. One is a Welsh girl who doesn’t speak Italian well, but is with us because ‘faith makes us have something in common that is much more than speaking the same language,’ and that can’t be reduced to the sum of our abilities, as another says: ‘I was amazed at how you welcomed me. It’s clear that you don’t do things just to do them. I’m an atheist, but I come to Mass with you because your difference comes from the fact that you are Christian, and I want to understand more.’ And this evening, yet another told me, ‘Here, I’ve found what I’ve been looking for all my life. You have a way of being together that is not normal.’ And then the case of a seminarian who studies at our university: I was struck because he had to expressly ask permission to come to School of Community with us, and then when he received permission he surprised me by immediately writing me a message to tell me. Why would he need to come to School of Community when he hears about Jesus all day long? I’m struck by the simplicity charged with affection that he has in his eyes every time he is with us. He’s not a fellow of many words, but his gaze is that of a person in love. The miracle is that these and other very simple faces are the opportunity for me to realize anew the difference I find in myself, one I’m not even aware of. Who are You, who have taken my life and are so fascinating that someone outside sees the difference right away?” This is a question about Christ that doesn’t arise from thoughts on Christ, from reading who knows what books, from a mood: it is born from what he touches, from the surprise of what he sees happening in the others, that he couldn’t imagine before. And he goes on, “It is a marvelous rediscovery of those unmistakable features of the Mystery that the simple hearts of my friends so evidently recognize and that thus also accompanies me in this discovery: ‘And you, who do you say I am?’ The name of Christ, so often just a label stuck on, something distant for me, is becoming a concrete and heavy You that I desire more and more to see again, a You made of moments of unmistakable differentness, but that is the most fascinating and beautiful thing I have ever encountered.”

It is so evident that you can trace it. A professor writes me, “A colleague, of a very different orientation than ours, came up to me after a graduation session and started a conversation that was very different from the usual. Normally, among colleagues, we never give ourselves away, never say things too revealing of ourselves. He obviously knows about me, and that day told me that recently he had met a number of students in the Movement, that he is very happy to work with them, that he respects them

very much because they have a critical sense, and are present, engaged in what they do [notwithstanding the situation described by CENSIS, there are some who are alive, present, engaged in what they do, have a critical sense]. Above all he perceives in them a solidity [instead of fragility], a personal substance that the others don't have, and then they are united, they help each other, and help others. He started with those of the community who serve as student representatives in various bodies, but then he identified the others, and he explained how. Since he was curious, he had begun marking on a piece of paper the first and last names of those who went to his office hours and who according to him must be in CL because they had the same way of facing life, the same positivity, the same critical sense, even though they were different from each other. In order to verify if he had guessed right, at a certain point he asked one of those he knew better and with whom he had a more familiar relationship: 'Excuse me if I ask you this question, but do these people'—and he said the first and last names on the list—'live your same experience?' and he answered, 'Yes.' He had guessed all the names."

This is anything but imagination! His presence, His contemporaneity appears today before our eyes. As Fr. Giussani says, "Instead of Him with His hair in the wind, instead of watching Him speak with His mouth opening and shutting, He arrives through our presence, which is like fragile masks, fragile skin, the fragile masks of something powerful, which is He who lies within—not I or him or you, but something that nevertheless passes through me, passes through you..."¹⁹

Therefore, the challenge is not to exhort each other to believe, but to help each other to look. Christianity is an event, and the point of departure for faith is in things we see, not in things you have to imagine, construct, or feel. Otherwise, the entire problem would be a matter of inflating our emotions or convincing ourselves of a position. The challenge is to look. As I said recently at a School of Community, what lacks is a faith not detached from these facts we find before our eyes. These facts are what we must look at.

One of you recently asked me, "At the Exercises, can you explain what faith is?" The point of departure is quickly described. "In our experience, there is something that comes from beyond it: unforeseeable, mysterious, but within our experience. If it is unforeseeable, not immediately visible, mysterious, with what instrument of our personality do we grasp this Presence? With that instrument called faith. Let's call this instrument 'faith,' to use a term that does not lead back to and is not exhausted by the

concept of reason, because the comprehension of experience in its immediately experiential factors belongs to reason—it is reason that perceives our experience in its immediate factors—but in experience [the witnesses we have heard] we feel the breath or the tremor or the consequences [a way of staying together, a way of looking at each other, a solidity of the people, a critical capacity, a being present] of a Presence that cannot be explained, that is surprising: a surprising encounter; therefore it is something beyond reason that can intuit and understand, and we call this faith, which is an intelligence of reality, an intelligence of experience."²⁰ Do we have this loyalty to acknowledge this "beyond" that we already perceive within experience?

Look at what else Fr. Giussani says: "This thing is the supportive nucleus of the entire conception of knowledge and of the understanding of reality from the Christian point of view: the entire nucleus of Christian intelligence is here. It is necessary to understand this. It isn't necessary to understand *how* Christ is here; it is necessary to understand that one is *obliged to affirm* that there is something else here; because we aren't able to simply explain what is here by investigation, analysis, or examination of our reason. When John and Andrew (we must always keep the first chapter of John's Gospel before us, from verse 35 onward: then you understand everything, the whole problem of intelligence is there; while the entire moral problem is within the twenty-first chapter, from verses 15 to 18), when John and Andrew watched that man speak, they felt there was something exceptional there. They were not able to realize—they did not understand how; that is, their reason was not capable of grasping it—however, to be reasonable, they were obliged to say: 'There is something else here.' Why? Because to be reasonable means to affirm reality according to the totality of its factors, and if one of these factors is exceptional, it is necessary to say that it's there, even if one doesn't understand how."²¹

The problem of what human intelligence is lies entirely within the experience of John and Andrew: whether we are loyal enough to enter all the way to the origin, to the deepest depth of the experience we have. Otherwise, we are not intelligent—I'm sorry for you, even if you always earn an A+ on your exams, because you are forced to eliminate a factor of experience. For this reason, the fact that a person is intelligent is demonstrated here, not in saying one is intelligent.

What does our freedom consist of, if we are intelligent? In the modality with which we respond to the question, "Who do you say I am? And you, who have seen these things, who do you say I am?" Here is the whole prob-

lem of intelligence and freedom. We can deny a factor or stop, but then it won't be for lack of evidence—we've seen it all—it won't be for lack of data, facts, events, witnesses, or miracles, but since the journey of knowledge we speak of is dramatic, it implicates freedom, and the attachment to our measure, our mood, can be played against the evidence of difference we've run into or against the correspondence we've experienced.

Therefore, we don't have to convince ourselves of anything. We're not here to convince each other, as if the more we're here, the more we'll convince each other. It's necessary to look at what has happened to us and use reason without censoring and without closure, because a faith without such an event and without this journey, without reason and without freedom, disappears into the nothingness of the muddle in which we live. If we don't make this whole journey in this moment of travail, we are, even after having seen what we have seen, a floating mine; not because the Lord has abandoned us or because we don't have energy (because no particular energy is needed)—what's needed is just the simplicity of the child to acknowledge, the simplicity of an acknowledgment.

3. The existentiality of memory

I'll say two last things, starting from a question one of you sent me: "How can my relationship with Him become existential dimension and living friendship? I entrusted the realization of my desires to images, but over time, seeing them fall or not keep their promises, I began to yield to the temptation to let a veil of apathy and indifference slip over everything. [See? It is the description of life]. At the beginning of last year there was a jolt. For the first time, the sincere discovery of the simple and passionate way some friends lived on the one hand, and the tenderness of the Lord (by now unhopéd-for) in giving me back an affection that I had by then lost, on the other hand, reawakened those urgent needs in me. This time, it was impossible to silence them. In particular, I felt a great need that life be united, that in every aspect of reality there be the possibility for that protagonism that the heart desires. The point of departure was my studies, maybe out of the somewhat unripe esteem for the Movement we spoke about last summer. I decided to put in common with some professor friends the questions that emerged from my studies, and that shared the common denominator of a need for protagonism, that is, a kind of willingness was born in me to let the Movement enter into this piece of my life, so routine and apparently banal [the true battle is whether we let images prevail or whether we let what has happened to us enter. This is

anything but imagination!]. Without my deciding anything in this regard, slowly but surely a work developed during the year, culminating this October in a three-day encounter at the university with students, professors, and entrepreneurs. Those days and the year of work to make them possible were a milestone for me [it's a very normal thing, he didn't have visions: in the day-to-day life of studies he let something different enter]. I had the opportunity to experience how the only alternative to the lackluster mediocrity that looms over life is to live everything in the relationship with Christ mysteriously alive in the Movement, the only One able to make me live up to what I desire. His protagonism in my life enabled my protagonism in reality; His power transfigured that shred of life I had entrusted to Him, bringing it to have a totalizing importance for my person, with an impact on history. In a moment in time when everyone at the university for one reason or another is complaining or despairing, for us it was possible to build, to bring something positive for everyone. Who is able to do something of this kind? I'm not the only one to say that this is something real and not the result of auto-suggestion; others testified to this too, for example a professor of ours who said at the end of the final encounter: 'If all our students were this way, the university would be different.' Others, often more willing than us not to reduce what was happening, like our rector who, speaking with a colleague from another city who asked us when elections were scheduled, insinuating that we'd invited him for propaganda, answered, 'No, the elections have nothing to do with it; these students are different.' So, I can answer the question, 'Who do you say I am?' with Peter's answer, without lying: 'You, who, overcoming all my infidelity and immorality, offer Yourself as the daily possibility for fullness of life, You, who enable me to have this unique human experience, You are the Christ, the Son of God.'"

For this reason, we live of memory (and not of a remembrance of the past): the memory of Him present. "So then, we can begin to understand what the defect of morality is in us: first of all, it is an absence of existentiality in the consciousness of belonging. That is, we don't have a strong enough sentiment of belonging to Christ."²² So, often, when each one says "I," not even out of the corner of the eye does the power of belonging to Something other appear, the ephemeral physical sign of which is our companionship, the historical sign of which is the Church, whose reality is Christ! But acknowledging Christ is a "choice of field in the present"²³: the awareness of belonging in act is the existentiality of memory. This is a work; I need to convert constantly to the content of this memory, not to

my imagination or mood, but to the content of this memory that I have seen at work before my eyes.

My wish for you is that you allow this Presence we see so powerfully at work to be increasingly dominant. We are in the condition Jesus describes: “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I say to you, many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.”²⁴ Many of our contemporaries would desire to see them, but do not see them. We are truly blessed, chosen. Living with this awareness is what makes us different and enables us to stay in reality without fear, even more amazed to see Him at work. In this grave moment of history, just who He is to whom we have consigned our life, and what marvelous passion He has for the destiny of each of us, can emerge even more. Life, if we live with this awareness, if we let His presence enter, is entirely different.

ASSEMBLY – JULIÁN CARRÓN
December 11th, afternoon

ANTONIO. *Today, in the last part of the lesson, you spoke of faith, saying that it's the way for knowing what reason can't explain. I wondered how such an indirect knowledge, that passes through concrete persons, friends, can become so concrete that I say, "I give my life for this."*

FR.CARRÓN. Can I ask you a few questions?

Yes.

Do you take the elevator sometimes?

Yes.

And do you take airplanes?

Yes.

And do you feel safe? That it won't fall? Do you have direct knowledge of this or indirect knowledge?

Direct in the sense that...

Direct?!

No, but... In the sense that having already taken planes other times, elevators other times, I know...

Well, the fact that you've taken it other times means that it couldn't fall the next time?!

No, it can fall.

Do you love your mother?

Yes.

And does your mother love you?

Yes.

Are you sure?

Yes.

How can you be so sure?

Because I have...

You have direct knowledge? Can you see your mother's love?

Yes.

No! You people don't realize that you see signs and you have to trust those signs! I want to put all of you in front of the experience you usually have: you reach certainty on many things you don't know directly. True?

Yes. But can I ask you another question?

Certainly.

I see my mother's love through signs, but I have my mother in front of me, and she has a concrete face; she's a concrete person.

The face yes, but you are sure that that face loves you because of what?
Because of signs.

We're back to the first point. Clear?

Yes.

I want it to be clear to everyone that there's a trick behind this question: we're convinced that indirect knowledge isn't certain; they've convinced us that the only modality of true knowledge is direct knowledge. So I can imagine how much difficulty you have in all the questions of living for which you can't reach direct knowledge, which is the majority, and the most decisive. So, the first consideration is: you have to see whether in every circumstance in which you reach certainty through indirect knowledge you manage to achieve true, certain knowledge. Second consideration: I don't give my life to a type of knowledge. I give my life to Him, about whom I reach certainty. Thus, once certainty is reached through knowledge... I don't give my life to a certain method of knowledge; I give it to Him. I can give my life if I can reach this certainty. But behind the question there's this difficulty: we are within a culture, within a modality of relating to reality that penetrates into us. So I give examples that have nothing to do with faith, to make you understand that this concerns everything. Then it also concerns faith, but the question is how this modality of knowing affects us.

MARTINA. *I note that there is a difference among you, a different way of staying together, and this is why I continue to stay here myself. You say that the origin of this difference is Jesus, but how can you have this certainty? How can you say that it is objective?*

FR. CARRÓN. The problem isn't ours. We've already given you an answer. The problem is yours.

Exactly.

How do you explain this difference? Why are you here? The question arises in the face of a difference you touch, you see, you bump into. In front of this difference, either you travel the road of knowledge to try to find an explanation, or you leave the question of this difference unanswered. The problem isn't first of all ours; we give you our answer and tell you the reason, we give it to you. This is not in order to end the discussion, but to offer you a working hypothesis you can use to verify whether this explanation is suitable for all the factors you see in this difference. Yet you can begin to give another type of answer: try, try to give other types of answers to explain this difference. If you find it, tell us.

Understand? Look, often in front of questions we close down, as if the fact of offering an answer stopped the dynamic of knowledge. We give you reasons, but in doing so don't ever want to stop the discussion, and you mustn't accept the answer uncritically. Fr. Giussani often used an expression that I love: working hypothesis. It's like when they give you some device and the company that produced it gives you a user's manual and tells you, "I offer you this working hypothesis to explain how it functions." You say, "Why should I believe this?" Try another way—who's stopping you? Try to see if there's another reasonable way to make it work. You find yourself in front of a difference, in front of something you have to explain. We give you a working hypothesis; it's a help for you. You ask, "Why should I accept?" So then, I'll give you some advice: try to offer another hypothesis. If you find it, we're happy to begin to "fight"...

Okay.

We say that the answer is Jesus, not because we don't have anything better to do or because we imagine Him, dear Martina. We say, "Jesus," because certain facts, certain consequences, a certain newness in life, in the experience of women and men, was documented only starting from a historic moment, is tied to a historic origin called Jesus, and didn't exist before. And in our own individual existences as well, when Jesus is not in the middle, we aren't able to cause this difference to emerge either. That is, we're not talking nonsense about Jesus. We say, "Jesus," because He is linked to a precise history, that has reached us, and when this history doesn't reach a certain place, people, these signs don't appear. This is why we say "Jesus." Now you can see, through this verification I invite you to do, if you find an alternative explanation that is reasonable, for the historic circumstances, for all the factors of the experience, so you can say, "No, this is explained very well by taking some pills or doing some special exercises or having some other type of experience." Try. Because the point of departure is precisely what you have identified very well: this difference. This difference is what you need to explain.

UBERTO. *This morning you said, "The miracle is a face behind which one intuits a fascinating difference." Yet if the acknowledgment of Christ present isn't the result of an effort, an imagination, but of an abandonment, an opening of the eyes, a leap of the heart, I would like to ask you to specify the positive features of this fascinating difference, in order to avoid the risk of falling into self-persuasion.*

FR. CARRÓN. “They have a critical sense, and are present, engaged in what they do. They have a solidity, they are united, they help each other, and help others,” in the words of the professor to his colleague. He didn’t create these features; he wasn’t self-persuaded. Though he came from a very different position, he simply had to acknowledge them. Therefore, we can say that the unmistakable feature is an exaltation of the human in the use of reason (critical sense), in the use of freedom (present, engaged)... In this regard, I’m very fond of the fourth chapter of Acts of the Apostles, an episode that often passes almost unobserved, when Peter and John are brought before the Sanhedrin because they’d begun to preach in the name of Jesus. We can all imagine these two country bumpkins before the professors of the time (the doctors of the law, the Pharisees, the high priests). And the Acts recount how these men were amazed before these two ignorant uneducated men (because, at the time, the only education was study of the Old Testament with a rabbi; we are in the first century in Palestine. They were people who made a living with a fishing cooperative and could neither read nor write). The Gospel of John recounts how the followers of Jesus were scorned: “Only you, common people, absolutely ignorant, could believe in Him. Have you ever seen someone important, educated, who believed in Him?” Instead, when John and Peter are brought before the Sanhedrin, all the big professors are dumbfounded because even though the two are uneducated, common men, they speak with boldness, with a freedom they could not explain, until, as the text in the Acts of Apostles comments, “they recognized them as the companions of Jesus.”²⁵ Here is the origin of that freedom, that audacity, that parrhesia! The origin of the inexplicable capacity to expound before such an illustrious audience was their friendship with Jesus: these are unmistakable features of the personality that emerges from the relationship with Christ present in history. They are the features of a difference that many of you document speaking with various people: it is a capacity to give reasons that document the contemporaneity of Christ. Precisely this is what that professor noted when he made his list of “different” students. Therefore, no self-persuasion, no emphasis: they are absolutely objective features. What’s needed is the simplicity of an acknowledgment.

SIMONA. *It seems to me that this morning you made things sound much easier than they are.*

FR. CARRÓN. It’s easy. I’m sorry for you, but it’s easy.

This morning, you said that one can leave the confusion and flattening of desire only with the experience of an encounter, and that only in Christ can we find rest. But, in reality, even encounters disappoint; that is, friends, people whom we meet are human, so they’re not perfect, right? So the question is: what can make me truly happy in my relationships? That is, what is there in the relationships that measures up to my desires? What holds up even in the face of human limitations? Because if everything disappoints, then the only solution is the choice of virginity.

Calm down, calm down...

Because in order to live our relationship with Christ, this seems to me to be the only solution...

Simona, let’s look at things together. First: when something strikes you, when you grasp a difference, the problem is to understand what’s inside that difference. I give you simple examples; it’s better to give examples that have nothing to do with faith, because if they hold there, then the things that concern Christ can also hold. If you taste a stupendous wine, even if later you taste others...

...The stupendous one remains the best.

See? It’s all here. The question is the judgment we make about that difference. It’s not that later it doesn’t remain—it remains, so much so that you can try to taste any other wines, and the more you taste, the more you realize that it isn’t the same, and that difference is heightened. Is it clear? So then, the point is that the Christian encounter has the same modality as every other encounter, but within there is a difference in the origin, that makes it remain forever. Why do the others disappoint, and this one not? Why? Because there, there’s something you have to explain. I don’t have to explain it: you find yourself before an experience of correspondence so manifest that then, even if you try to repeat it, to recreate it, you’re not able. This means that there, there’s something that—as I said before to Martina—you have to explain: why is it different? What’s inside that makes it different? Because whatever it is, that is what makes the difference between the Christian encounter and other encounters that disappoint. I understand that since we call everything “encounter” (and we call everything “wine”), there’s the temptation to put everything in the same bag, to get confused, to say that everything is equal to everything. No, no, no, no, no, no, no! We use the same word, but the experience we have is different, and for this reason we can recognize among different faces the Face. You can imagine

that John and Andrew had already encountered many faces... Why did they follow only Him? Were they stupid or confused?

I don't think so...

And the more they followed Him, the more it was evident for them how that exceptionality outlasted any trial, any circumstance. And when everyone abandoned Him, Jesus did not spare even them the question, "Do you want to go, too?" Jesus didn't plead, "Now don't leave Me alone, please, have mercy on Me!" No, Jesus doesn't want any charity from you. Understand?

It's true that there are encounters and encounters, that is, in some a difference is evident and in others maybe less so. However, at a certain point precisely these decisive encounters for my life get taken away—for example, my boyfriend leaves me after three years, or one of my best friends goes to America. So I say that even though these encounters have this importance, they necessarily disappoint, because they are taken away from me. So then, what holds up in the face of this?

You're short-circuiting He who makes Himself present through those relationships and the subject who carries them. Because it can happen that you encounter Christ through a person who later leaves. So then, does this mean that Christ disappoints, that what a certain person made you encounter isn't true? If someone teaches you math and then stomps on what he told you, does it mean that he didn't introduce you to the truth of what he taught you?

No, that is...

This is the question. If you, through fragile people like us, with limits like ours, reach something that is true, it remains true forever. If you've met Christ and perceived what He brings to your life, if the person who introduced you to this knowledge then leaves, should you leave too? The witness introduces you to something that lasts forever, even if he leaves. That is, he disappoints you, not Christ, whom he enabled you to meet. If we don't look deeply into the difference, then we mix everything up.

Yes.

Then, as for the vocation to virginity, this is another question. You don't decide the vocation; an Other decides it. In any case, the vocation is to the happiness of finding Him, and it's for everyone, even for those who don't embrace virginity. Clear?

Thank you.

MICHELE. *Today you said that acknowledging the Lord is absolutely simple, but for me now this isn't so. Then you concluded saying that acknowledgment is a work. How do work and simplicity fit together?*

FR. CARRÓN: One thing at a time. Is it simple to acknowledge the Lord?
At times; it depends.

Let's start with the easiest times. The more exceptional a thing is, the easier it is to acknowledge it, right? The more beautiful the mountains are, the easier it is to say, "How beautiful!" Right or wrong?

Right.

The more beautiful a girl is, the more quickly you say, "How beautiful!" Do you have any difficulty recognizing beauty, even if the sky is cloudy or you're in a bad mood?

No.

Maybe your mood will improve seeing her... The simplicity is linked to the awesomeness of the fact, to the exceptionality of the presence, to the object I have before me. This is why it's simple. The work is linked to freedom. The fact that something is exceptional, and thus easy to acknowledge as such, doesn't spare you the freedom to adhere. Any of us, myself included, before something awesome can say, "No, I don't want to acknowledge it."

No, it's not that way! That is, at times circumstances are much more arid, and it's truly difficult to recognize Christ. The encounter happened to me, but...

Excuse me just a moment. Acknowledgment doesn't depend on the energy of your will, only on your freedom. To say that the mountains are beautiful you don't need any particular energy. Right or wrong? You people are confusing things. When you get down to it, for you, Christianity is moralism, so when you don't have energy you think you can't manage. But if Christianity is a fact, the acknowledgment of an Other, it's a problem of freedom! What particular energy do you need to acknowledge the beauty of the mountains or a starry sky or the beauty of a girl? Do you need some particular training? Do you need a surplus of energy, or to take some vitamins? The freedom by which you acknowledge something is very simple; you just have to yield to the attraction. Then, we can choose not to yield, but not because it's not easy, but because we are resisting something. Actually, you need more energy to resist than to yield! So there are two simple things: one concerns the object I have before me (the exceptionality), while the other concerns the subject who has to acknowledge it (freedom). You're dreaming of a kind of knowledge that spares

your freedom. It doesn't exist; I'm sorry, not even before the beauty of the mountains, because freedom must always be involved. And this involvement of freedom—as we said at the Fraternity Spiritual Exercises this year—is decisive, because without this, it will never be yours, understand? For example, to let someone embrace you, what do you need? Nothing, just to yield. Did Zacchaeus have to make any particular effort with Christ? No, he accepted the invitation: “Come down, I need to eat at your house.”

So the work is to say yes to this circumstance?

Exactly. It's a work because it's not automatic. You may love a person, but it's not automatic to ask, “Will you marry me?” You have to say it with all your freedom for this to be truly yours; it's not like you say it the way you drink a beer, right? The more something beautiful is at stake, something decisive for your life, the more your freedom is engaged. It's simple to acknowledge the good that woman means for your life; there are thousands of signs. It's very easy to acknowledge it, but when you ask her to marry you, you have to engage your freedom, so much so that you think before doing it.

ALESSANDRO. *I felt fully described in the reductions you dwelt on this morning, and it's clear how the only way to leave them behind is to run into an exceptional Presence that is capable of attracting all my reason and affection like a magnet. The challenge, then, is not to convince myself about the faith, but to look at this Presence at work. How does one educate his own freedom so that this openness and this acknowledgment of the Mystery present become increasingly habitual and stable in every circumstance?*

FR. CARRÓN. Thank you. This is a question we have to return to over and over again, because it's a fundamental aspect of education. Giussani always taught us that this openness you spoke of is the original openness of the child. The documentation of this original openness is the child's curiosity. But we all see that this openness does not last. Thus Fr. Giussani said that to last, it needs the engagement of the person, and this is our work. Fr. Giussani gave a very striking example: how many times have we spent an afternoon letting ourselves go without doing anything? He explains that when you let yourself go this way, the things that before, in other moments, one felt as correspondent and attractive, at a certain moment seem to lose their meaning, because we no longer have this openness. This means that an education is needed. How can we educate ourselves to this? Remaining open to that modality with which the Mystery

constantly reawakens us. If, no matter what happens, we accept the challenge of the provocation of reality and let ourselves be educated, bit by bit there emerges a capacity to be open that is increasingly ours. Jesus invites us constantly to be like children being adults, that is, to remain with the original attitude, with this original openness even when we are adults. The provocations of reality—we've heard about many of them this morning—are occasions in which we are constantly challenged: we can take advantage of them to educate ourselves to this openness, or we can give up, fooling ourselves that it's automatic.

LORENZO. *Today you said that for us the event happens intermittently because hidden behind is feeling. Why is it that in the darkest moment, when life is dragged along by other feelings, these feelings seem more concrete than the acknowledged Fact? Why this reluctance to use reason in a true way?*

FR. CARRÓN. According to you, why?

Because we don't realize what's happening.

Perfect! The reluctance is there because we—who are not idiots—know that this true use of reason at times involves a sacrifice and we're not willing to make it. Think of the miracle of the man born blind. It's not that the Jews hadn't seen that blind man begging every day; they knew very well who he was! Why were they reluctant to use reason, to acknowledge the fact? Why? Because this meant having to change position, not because the fact in and of itself wasn't evident before their eyes.

Exactly.

The truth is that we are very astute—much more than we realize—and we immediately make a very quick comparison. Since we immediately guess the consequences of acknowledging what we've seen so evidently, the only way of avoiding them is to deny the original fact, and thus we block reason. If those Jews had acknowledged the miracle of the man born blind, that would've been the end of their presumption, and they knew it full well; they weren't stupid. They knew perfectly well that if they accepted that that man was blind and now sees, they would have to begin a journey: “But if he was blind and now he sees, who is this Jesus who healed him?” A question like that pops up even in the most obtuse of men. And since they weren't willing to change their idea of Him, with everything that would have implied—because they would've had to follow Him; they, who were the leaders, would have had to become disciples, and everything would have been overturned—what did they do? Here, Lorenzo, you have the reluctance to reason painted

perfectly. Did the other things seem more concrete than the acknowledged fact? No, the fact was there, manifest, before them, but they weren't willing. Reluctance is the modality with which we defend ourselves from the consequences of the acknowledged Fact and of the sacrifice that this acknowledgment involves. And yet, even those Jews had to submit to reasonableness—so much is man made for the truth—and therefore they had to deny everything: “No, this man was never blind.”

This way it's clear.

So then, friends, who persuades us not to yield to this reluctance to reason? Who? I always think of the end of the third chapter of *The Religious Sense*, where Fr. Giussani says that only one thing can persuade us: the love of ourselves as destiny. If you don't love yourself to the point of being willing to follow what makes you truly happy, why bother? No authority outside yourself makes you do it. Only if you have an instant of tenderness, of true love for yourself, can you be willing to make this sacrifice. Decide. This is the drama of living, folks. But let it be clear that it's one thing not to have the evidence of the fact, and quite another to choose to say no.

FEDERICO. *Never as much as in these days have I heard so much about Christ present and the fact that we don't have to convince ourselves of anything, but just look and help each other to look. How can the friendship with Him become so alive that I can recognize He's there even when I'm alone?*

FR. CARRÓN. The friendship with Him becomes alive the way any true friendship becomes alive. If you find some friends, how does this friendship become increasingly alive?

Staying together with them.

Perfect! You verify that staying with them, your life is more alive, you are helped more to face all the circumstances, you're supported more in the difficulties, and therefore the reasonableness and the beauty of that friendship come to light more and more, and then the friendship becomes truer and truer. What did the disciples do? The same thing you're describing: they got involved in a relationship with Him and this relationship continually brought them to a much more alive attachment, much more convincing, to the point that when everyone left Him, they stayed. Imagine how, bit by bit, this friendship grew in intensity and certainty. How can it grow in us? In the same way—if you enter into reality with the presence of Christ through the place where it happened. Why? Because the friendship with Him grows if you verify it in reality. If you don't risk in reality what you've encountered, you won't

be able to grow in the certainty that He is able to change circumstances. Let's give Him the chance, the space, the opportunity to demonstrate who He is! If you cling more and more to Him, you will see more and more who He is. It's one thing to see the victory of Christ in our thoughts, and another to see it in reality. This friendship with Him will become increasingly convincing if you see it grow in reality, because you know a lot of things about Christ, but until you see Him working in reality, you won't cling to Him. I understand this. I tell you this because I studied a lot, I prayed a lot, but I understood what a difference there was only when I began to experience His action in reality, and the certainty that I reached was far beyond anything I could have imagined. This is why I say that we become increasingly more certain, the friendship with Him intensifies, to the extent that you verify Him in reality and you see more and more the facts that document who He is. And I'll add: where would you go without Him? What would life be without being able to rest in acknowledgment of Him? As one of you said, “Silence is the most beautiful thing!” And yet this—that silence is the most beautiful thing—is the furthest thing for many Christians. Instead, when one experiences this, then she acquires a level of relationship and intensity that is incomparable, because our silence—as we said yesterday—is not a void that we have to try to fill. No, Christian silence starts from a fullness, from the Event that leaves us speechless, from the awesomeness of a Presence that leaves me dumbfounded, so much does it assert Itself with an unequalled exceptionality. And so one desires more and more to deepen this relationship, that isn't disconnected from reality but is ever more linked to reality, and increasingly brings you to silence, because silence is full of this reality, of this seeing Him at work before your eyes. And then you remain increasingly amazed before these unmistakable features, as Fr. Giussani taught us—with a driven tension to say His name. Because living, friends, is the memory of Him. This is the summary of a story, of a journey, not a formula; through this I summarize an experience. Jesus summarized it this way: “Living is the memory of Me.” But who understands this? Those who spend time thinking and rethinking the formula in their heads? No, those involved in an experience that makes them say, “It's true, it's true, living is memory of Him.” This is why St. Paul, who had had this experience, summarizes it very well, “Even while living in the flesh, I live in the faith of the Son of God; I live in the memory of Him, and His presence increasingly prevails over every other thing.”

PIETRO. *I still don't understand the question of memory. How can it be on the same level of the Event, or how can memory itself be an event? It always seems to me that event is the so-called "big league" and memory is "little league," in which I just turn to remembrance. From the point of view of feeling, too, an event makes me feel a certain way, which instead is never renewed in the work of memory.*

FR. CARRÓN. Do you see? This is a manifest example of how we understand Christian words only if we start from experience, because what have you done now? Event is "big league," that is, it's real and present; memory is "little league"—a remembrance. That is, we take the words in their common meaning, outside Christian experience. But for us, memory isn't a remembrance! We use the word "memory" because the Event began in a moment of history: Jesus arrived—we celebrate Christmas soon—in a moment in space and time, not before. The Event has a memory, but we don't live on a remembrance, as many Christians often think: "The Apostles experienced the 'big league' (living with Him), but we're in the 'little league' (we're just living an *ersatz* experience)." As if we couldn't have an experience just like theirs. But if we can't have their same experience, it's not worth it, because then we can't verify if what happened to them also happens to us. Instead, as Fr. Giussani always taught us, what began then can reach us as it reached others already during the earthly life of Jesus, when He sent the seventy-two; and what He introduced reached others, not directly through Jesus, but through those seventy-two; and now it reaches us through our "fragile masks," as we said this morning. But what arrives is really Him! Therefore, the Event endures in history. Therefore, memory is event, as the Pope said for the funeral of our friend Manuela; it is present. Since He is constantly remembering us in the present, we can be *Memores Domini*. If He weren't *Memor nostri* present, that is, if He didn't remember us now, if He didn't happen in the present, we couldn't be *Memores Domini*, we couldn't live in the memory of Him. But it's as if we took it for granted... Look each other in the face a moment, please. Is someone here simply because of something the others recounted? Have you had the experience of a correspondence, or are you here because it's just something you heard, because you remember a lesson you heard? But who would bring you here, if it were just for a remembrance, if each had not had the same identical experience of an encounter as the one we described this morning? This is the documentation of His presence, because without Him at work, this wouldn't exist. How were His contemporaries able to acknowledge the divine identity of Jesus? Through

unmistakable features. And now we can acknowledge Him in the same way, from the same identical unmistakable features. For this reason, memory isn't just remembrance; memory is present since He continues to remember us, since He attracts us now, since He remembers us now, and to remember us He has to be present. For this reason we can call ourselves *Memores Domini*.

IVAN. *The university elections didn't go very well. Analyzing what happened, we said that the lack of positive outcome was because we have formed too few relationships at the university, so now it seems that the solution is to know more people, to be more visible on the Internet to publicize the candidates, to use the right strategy. However, it seemed to me that what you were saying about being a presence that attracts and moves is something different, something that has to do with my "I" and Christ present. Give us a hand on this.*

FR. CARRÓN. Thank you. To answer, I think that the best form is to let other friends speak, to recount their experiences and what the presence is for them.

MARCO. *I'll start out by reading my notes from this morning: "In this flattening, something can happen that can make us alive now, not two thousand years ago. The point of departure of faith is objective, something outside; it's irreducible and is there before us, so evident that one can trace it. The Mystery chose a method that we can't manipulate. Who are You who has taken my life and made it so fascinating to everyone?" Today, I think these words described perfectly what we have experienced in these months of university, starting from all the work done last year with you and also from the question you provoked us with last summer at the Equipe [CL leaders meeting]: "What does it mean to be a presence at the university?" So some of us worked throughout the year on some of the Meeting exhibits: the exhibit on the economic crisis, the one on Florenski, and the one on Masaccio, Beato Angelico, and Piero della Francesca. A ton of people came to all three. These exhibits were initiatives of people who began to ask, "Can what we have encountered reach the point of judging even in detail what happens in the world like the crisis, or what we're passionate about, like Russia or art?"—and these works emerged, as points of newness, also culturally speaking, in our university. I was impressed first of all at how certain professors who certainly can't be called our friends grasped what was behind them (like one who, hearing murmuring while some friends were proposing the exhibit on the economic crisis, said: "Kids, don't you realize that it is the only opportunity*

you have in these years to lift your heads from your books and look at something interesting, a new way of approaching the economy?”). The second thing that struck me was that we were the first to be amazed; even with all the travail of the university reform and all the protests that are happening now, there’s a point that isn’t determined by circumstances (political, social, etc.). You can react instinctively, or there’s a point of newness that remains. An exhibit passes, but the gain we’ve had, the gain of those who made the exhibits, this is the thing that remains, that is, that explosion of the human you spoke of before.

FR. CARRÓN. Thank you.

DAVIDE. *These weeks at the university have been pretty hard (occupations, protests). As early as the first commotions, I began to think that it was necessary to form a judgment, that is, discover an interesting position in all this chaos. I began to think about it also on the advice of some friends and discovered that many in our community had this desire. We had an assembly with everyone to understand what really is written in the university reform and to judge together what was happening. To help, we began drafting a flyer, but we got bogged down right away: what do we want to say, what do we want to propose? It was evident that the idea of dismantling, point by point, the position of the protestors (given that among other things they were protesting things that aren’t written in the reform) was limiting—it’s too easy to oppose one ideology with another (I say “ideology” because they would have only been ideas). So we began looking at our daily experience at the university and saw how the most impressive thing that happens to us are the unexpected encounters with professors and companions, people who are alive, interested, and curious, and who don’t let themselves be crushed by difficulties, but still believe that the university can be a place to educate and be educated. The most beautiful thing for us, in fact, is running into an exceptionality that also passes through the most absurd people and to give them space, clinging tenaciously. So then the proposal we made to our friends, our companions, was to seek an exceptionality every day in what exists, and not let it go, even if it’s hard and seems that only chaos dominates. This toilsome inquiry is the only thing that holds up at the university because it’s the only thing that holds up in time. This inquiry can never be stopped by a reform, by a mistaken system, or by those who want us out of the university. For us, the only hope for leaving behind the flatness is this, because it clearly responds to our truest desires at the university. This is a small witness to what you said this*

morning, that is, that desire is renewed by the encounter with an exceptional Presence. This is what we have experienced and thus it is this that we have proposed to our friends.

FR. CARRÓN. A presence, as we said this summer, is determined by a difference that all can acknowledge. Naturally, then, we can use all the means we want, but the question is not to confuse this difference with the instruments we use, because with the same instruments we can transmit a difference or, on the other hand, the same banalities as everyone. Speaking in the abstract, no means can be excluded *a priori*, but the question isn’t the instrument we use; we can produce a flyer, but if we say what everyone says, where’s the difference? I haven’t felt it. We can staff tables or do an exhibit, but if there isn’t a different gaze... The problem is not so much the instruments, which we can change some day if we discover more suitable ones; the question is whether the instrument makes present the difference that has crashed into our lives. This is the witness of an experience (as we say in the flyer, “The forces that change history are the same as those that change man’s heart”). An ideological response isn’t enough. What’s needed is to show an experience through presences of people who document a different humanity in any field—people who don’t feel condemned to disappointment or bewilderment, but who live up to their desires. This is the challenge.

SUMMARY – JULIÁN CARRÓN
December 12th, morning

Each of us arrived here on Friday with our own needs, worries, and problems, and were invited to immerse ourselves in His presence. What does that mean? As we have seen, very often this happens for us according to our imagination or feelings, and it is a struggle for us to leave this behind. But what has the Lord done, knowing this situation of ours? He generated a presence so irreducible that we could be freed from our own images, from the reduction to mood; each one of us has been able to experience what has happened: an objective gesture that cannot be reduced to our thoughts and our feelings. Each of us can look at what has happened. We have followed the criterion Fr. Giussani has always offered us: “Bit by bit, as the words reached them, and their gaze, stunned and amazed, penetrated that Man, they felt themselves change, felt that things were changing. The meaning of things was changing, the echo of things was changing, the journey of things was changing. And when they returned in the evening, at the end of the day very probably traveling the road in silence, because they had never spoken among themselves as they did in that great silence in which an Other spoke, in which He continued to speak and reverberated within them—and when they arrived home, Andrew’s wife, looking at him, asked him, ‘What is it, Andrew, what is it?’”²⁶ In these days, we have been before a Presence and—with our silence, with our witness, with our contribution—we have seen things change, penetrate within ourselves. We, too, have been filled with silence, as one recounted yesterday, seeing friends who not only respected silence during the bus trip, but also after arriving at the hotel, while they were waiting for lunch to start. What was happening? How can this be explained, if not with the fact that, like John and Andrew, we travel the road in silence because we have never spoken among ourselves as we do in that great silence in which an Other speaks, in which an Other dominates our whole being?

So then, we will understand more and more what that encounter meant for them to the degree to which that experience happens in us. It is not just the sentimental memory of the past, because we begin to understand what that thing meant for them. For this reason, Fr. Giussani offers us the scene of John and Andrew as the succinct experience of a Presence so exceptional that when we see it penetrate and dominate within us, it changes us so profoundly, and amazes us so much that it fills us with silence.

His presence dominates life, no longer reduced to our imaginings, no longer reduced to our fantasies, no longer reduced to our effort—not the toil of creativity, but the simplicity of acknowledgment. For this reason, the most obvious sign, as one of you said, is this: “Yesterday, I had the experience of a weight being lifted from me.” Do you understand why I used the word “rest” yesterday? Because before this Presence, you don’t have to continue supporting things; it’s not up to you to carry things; you’re not the one who has to try to keep things standing. He exists and He dominates, and I can rest in His presence. The sign of this Presence is liberation. The sign is rest. The sign is silence. The sign is change. What liberates, what changes, what fills life with this amazement and this silence is not an explanation, a remembrance, a titanic effort of our own, but a fact that has the form of the encounter with a present Presence. Always, as long as there is Christianity, it will be this way. If it isn’t this way, friends, it isn’t Christianity, because the episode of John and Andrew is the unmovable canon of what Christianity will always be. If what those two witnessed to us happens, then it can be called Christianity; if this is not the case, friends, we may use Christian words, but it isn’t Christianity. We’re not the ones who decide what Christianity is! We learn what Christianity is when it happens, like they did. John and Andrew didn’t know what Christianity was. They had no idea, couldn’t even have started from the category “Christianity,” didn’t have an image as we do. For them, Christianity coincided with the experience of acknowledgment of a Presence that dominated and changed life.

Therefore, we can affirm—as we said yesterday—that it is easy (as it was easy to observe silence). Do you understand why I say that with the same ingredients we can make two different soups? Silence can be the outcome of the assertion of a Presence that leaves us speechless, of the amazement that He generates, of the power of His embrace, or it can be merely our titanic attempt to do it, and so we express ourselves with Christian words but we speak of something else, of our own constructiveness, of our own attempt. Instead, when it happens according to its nature, according to what is documented in the Gospels, it’s easy and we know this from experience. If someone says it is difficult, he has to say it against the evidence of experience, and so he’s lying, and he knows it!

This evidence facilitates the freedom to adhere. Be careful though, because it facilitates; it doesn’t spare us adherence. It isn’t automatic. It wouldn’t be human if it were automatic. And, in fact, we can resist the evidence. Before the many miracles the contemporaries of Jesus saw, it was

manifest; they had Him right in front of them, and He asserted Himself with patently clear evidence. Could anyone say that it wasn't easy? But they could resist. Why? Because their freedom came into play. So then, if at times it seems difficult to us, it isn't because it isn't easy to recognize Christ, but because, since our freedom is involved, we intuit the consequences immediately, like the Jews with the man born blind, and so we block reason (it is the reluctance of reason you asked about yesterday). It is a resistance one has to justify.

Therefore, before the awesomeness of His presence, the original openness with which the Mystery created us is drawn into play. Because the Mystery created us—as we see in children—with this original openness; He wants to give us something that is far beyond our wildest imaginings, to fill our life far beyond our energies, all our capacity to create. It is His gift. This is why He made us with a structural disproportion and with bottomless, unbounded desire: in order to fill us with a thing we cannot produce ourselves, but must accept, welcome, embrace as a gift. He created us with this openness to put us in better conditions, but without imposing anything on us.

But since this openness often closes off, as we see, education is needed. What in the child is spontaneous, in the adult is the fruit of an education, because we know that we can close ourselves off. But when we see this openness in an adult, it is an impressive sight.

This encounter with the Presence happens in a place. This is why Fr. Giussani, knowing our condition, tells us that the greatest sacrifice is acknowledging a Presence, and this Presence for us is a place: the charism.

André Malraux said, "There is no ideal to which we can sacrifice ourselves, because we know the lies of all of us, we who do not know what truth is."²⁷ So then the true question is: what is worth the sacrifice? It is worthwhile only for a Presence whose affirmation coincides with our salvation. You can affirm the "you" of another because that "you" makes you more yourself. And this can be done only by the great You.

We affirm the historical presence of this place through which Christ attracts us, fascinates us, because in this place we feel our "I" reawakened, feel that our desire is fulfilled, feel that our life comes forth with all its potential. For this reason, Fr. Giussani says, "If Christ brought you to know Him through these circumstances, represented by these faces, it is through these faces, these circumstances that He changes you, that He makes your heart, your soul, your mind great."²⁸ Why is it reasonable to follow these faces? Only because it's to your own advantage, humanly,

because it makes your heart, soul, and mind great, because it changes you, because it exalts your "I" in a way that you cannot manage by yourself, because it exalts your reason in a way you wouldn't be able to do alone, because you experience freedom, affection, critical sense, and you are present in reality with a solidity that you see the others don't have, such that even those who don't know you see it. It's to our advantage.

This is the documentation of what Fr. Giussani always told us: the goal of the charism is to show that the faith is to your advantage, that it is in your best interests to acknowledge this Presence, that this Presence is pertinent to the needs of your life. But in order for this to happen, as we have seen, an irreducible Presence is needed. At times, this angers us because it doesn't coincide with our images. Thank goodness it doesn't coincide with our images, because if it coincided, if it could be reduced to our images, we would remain alone with our images and our incapacity! Thank goodness it is irreducible, because otherwise we would phagocytize this Presence, make it become ours! In fact, only an otherness can lead us to what we by ourselves are unable to reach.

For this reason, it is in the relationship with this place that we verify the promise intuited when we encountered it. It is in the relationship with Him that the disciples verified the fulfillment of that promise they intuited the first day. As one of you said yesterday, often we enter reality with our own images; therefore we have to verify what happens entering into reality with our own images or entering with the otherness of this irreducible Presence that generates our Movement. Because—as we see—our temptation is precisely that of reducing everything to an image: boyfriend, parents, companions. Therefore, why not attempt to reduce Christ, too? Instead, only His irreducibility can free us from our images. Thus, it is important that we realize that this irreducibility, which we try to defend ourselves from, because it irritates us—we speak this way—is to our advantage. This irreducibility, even if it irritates us, is to our advantage. Someone can say, "I hate you," but can't help but acknowledge, "Even though I hate you, I want to stay with you" (and this says, once again, how it is not automatic). The battle between the irreducibility of the Mystery revealed and our attempt to phagocytize His presence: this is the battle that Christ introduced into history, friends. This is why the powers that be want to eliminate this irreducibility, reducing Christianity to values or thoughts. In fact, if one eradicates this irreducibility, we remain alone with our images, with our incapacities.

Don't think that the Mystery chose this method—becoming flesh—by chance: this is the sign of His tenderness and His passion for each of us.

This is how we can know Christ more and more, enter into familiarity with Him through the facts that document who He is, what kind of human subject He generates, what marvelous freedom He gives us, what solidity He brings to our life.

So then, one clings more and more to Jesus, not to become more pious, but out of this heartfelt gratitude at seeing what experience of human newness of living one receives as a gift from Him. So we can answer with objectivity the question, “Who do you say I am?” We can answer according to what we have experienced, not according to our images or according to what is dictated by the powers that be. Only in the present can I experience that He enables me to answer: “Now I know You, not from what I've heard others say, but because of what my eyes have seen.”

For this reason, memory is not just the remembrance of a past (because no past is able to operate effectively by itself); it is a continually present origin. How do I see that the origin is present? In the facts of the present. It is the memory of the presence of the Lord.

The Pope, during the Mass for Manuela in the Vatican, said, “This remembrance of the Creator is not only remembrance of the past, because the origins are present, it is a memory of the Lord's presence. It is also a memory of the future.”²⁹ We need to memorize these sentences! The memory of the presence of the Lord, that changes us, that makes us in turn become a presence, makes us different in the way of living the things everyone lives, of living the life of everyone (studies, relationships of love, play, work, free time). It's not just a matter of doing other things; it is this difference that makes us truly a presence, and attentive people realize it, not because we do sensational things, but because of this solidity, this critical sense, this way of being interested, of helping, of loving.

I'll close with a moving passage of Fr. Giussani about John and Andrew: “Just think, we moved because of those two! Because of those two who watched Him speak, who watched Him speak with simplicity, humility, innocence of heart, we have been moved; those two moved our lives and move them now! And in fifty thousand years, should the world still endure, others would be moved like us, more or less doesn't matter.”³⁰ We have all moved because John and Andrew moved, so Christianity has reached us. Therefore, the method is the same: just as all of us moved because of those two, so others will move if we move. There is no other method; there is no other logic.

Responding to this gaze, this gift: this is the good of the world. All of us have the documentation of many facts that constitute this good of the world. If people move, they can reach others. For this reason, let's ask, let's ask together with the entire Church, “Come, Lord Jesus, during this time of Advent, and grant us grace so we can move like those two.” ■

¹ He is referring to the Meeting of Cairo, held October 28-29, 2010.

² *Heb.* 12:1-2.

³ Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI on the occasion of the funeral Mass for the *Memoires Domini* Manuela Camagni, member of the pontifical family. November 29, 2010.

⁴ L. Giussani, *Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*, Rimini, 1987, pro manuscripto, pp. 14-15.

⁵ A. Bagnasco, “Educazione patrimonio necessario per il Paese” [“Education, a patrimony necessary for the nation”], in *Avvenire*, November 9, 2010, p. 5.

⁶ Cf., “Rapporto annuale del Censis” [“CENSIS Annual Report”], in *Corriere.it*, December 3, 2010.

⁷ “The forces that change history are the same as those that change man's heart” at http://www.clonline.org/articoli/eng/volCL101210_eng.pdf.

⁸ L. Giussani, *L'io, il potere, le opere* [*The I, Power, Works*], Marietti, Genova, 2000, p. 168.

⁹ Op.cit., “The forces...”

¹⁰ Op.cit., “The forces...”

¹¹ Op.cit., “The forces...”

¹² L. Giussani, *Tutta la terra desidera il Tuo volto* [*All the Earth Desires Your Face*], San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo, 2000, p. 124.

¹³ Benedict XVI, Prayer Vigil on the Eve of the Beatification of Cardinal John Henry Newman, Hyde Park, London, September 18, 2010.

¹⁴ *Is It Possible to Live This Way? Vol. 2: Hope*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008, pp. 47-48.

¹⁵ *Rom* 7:24.

¹⁶ *Is* 49:14-16.

¹⁷ L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010, p. 8.

¹⁸ L. Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987)* [*The “I” Is Reborn in an Encounter*], Bur, Milan, 2010, p. 44.

¹⁹ L. Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way? Vol. 2: Hope*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008, p. 146.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 103-104.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 105-106.

²² L. Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987)* [*The “I” Is Reborn in an Encounter*], op. cit., p. 45.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

²⁴ *Lk* 10:23.

²⁵ *Acts* 4:13.

²⁶ L. Giussani, “Il tempo si fa breve,” *Esercizi della Fraternità di Comunione e Liberazione*, [“Time is Getting Short,” *Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*], Cooperativa editoriale Nuovo Mondo, Milan 1994, pp. 24-25.

²⁷ A. Malraux, *La tentation de l'Occident*, Bernard Grasset, Paris, 1926, p. 216 (“Il n'est pas d'idéal auquel nous puissions nous sacrifier, car de tous nous connaissons les mensonges, nous qui ne savons point ce qu'est la vérité”).

²⁸ L. Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way: Vol. 3: Charity*, op. cit., p. 84.

²⁹ Benedict XVI, Holy Mass in Suffrage for Manuela Camagni, December 2, 2010.

³⁰ L. Giussani, “Time is Getting Short,” op. cit., p. 24.