

“When a new ‘I’ is generated”

Notes from a dialogue with Julián Carrón and a group of students at the Equipe of the Communion and Liberation University Students on the theme “By these facts, you will know that I am the Lord” (Corvara, August 30, 2018).

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Julián Carrón. “By these facts, you will know that I am the Lord” (cf. Ex 10:2). This was the title for our summer vacations. And, as we’ve said, the precondition for us to be surprised by those facts through which we know He is the Lord is an “affectivity,” in the sense of the word Fr. Giussani demonstrates by telling the story of that young man who, hiking along the trail that leads from a town in Val Gardena to the top of Mount Pana, kept his eyes on the ground, stopping here and there to collect a rock. After watching for awhile, Giussani figured it out: they were fossils. That man was a scientist, who, because all his attention was focused on discovering fossils, was able to notice them. He didn’t conjure up the fossils; they were already there, but a person without that attention, interest, and particular curiosity, like Fr. Giussani, had

never been able to spot them despite having walked that trail many times. Only an affective energy toward some facet of the truth of reality can sharpen our eyes to see things. Now, to prepare for this time together, we posed a few questions as the agenda for the day: In all that we lived over the summer (vacations, gestures, the Rimini Meeting, the pilgrimage to see the Pope in Rome, our free time), were there facts that generated such a wonder in us that it engaged the totality of our “I,” pushing us to recognize Christ, to say His name? When were we surprised by recognizing Him? What proved to be capable of regenerating our lives?

Matteo. *After everything that happened this summer, there is one thing I can say with greater certainty: wholeheartedly following what the Movement proposes to me is good for my life because, as you*

were saying just now, it is regenerative. I’ll try to say how, describing what happened to me when I participated in two gestures. During our community’s vacation, some of us prepared a “guided listening” presentation on Rachmaninov. It was an hour of really beautiful music, and the thought I walked away with was this: his music was the fruit of his belonging to the history of the Russian people. In fact, when he emigrated to the United States, he pretty much stopped composing. That idea blew me away; I immediately thought, “Do I have a ‘Russian people?’” What makes me the person I am? The answer is simple: my “Russian people” is the Church, which reaches me through this companionship. Who would I be if they tore me away from that bond? At this point, “who I am” is always in relation to this belonging. It’s a dizzying experience, as if my entire life hangs in the balance of this encounter. Not in the sense that my life depends on an asso-



On these pages, some shots taken during the CLU Equipe (photos by Gaia Pomelli).

ciation or an organization, no matter how beautiful, one in which your friends belong, too, so it doesn't feel as empty as the others. No, I realized that, in belonging to this history, I belong to Christ; I belong to that Presence that I continue to encounter in the unity of those who believe in Him. Concretely, I belong to CL, it's true, but I am His in a much deeper way. I realized this even more in Rome, in going to the vigil proposed by the Pope. The way the gesture was organized may have been more attuned to some temperaments than others, but when the Pope asked us to be silent, what happened was that same inexplicable unity I saw on the vacation, which surprised me again. As I looked around at the thousands of young people surrounding me I thought, "They were all touched by the same thing that touched me," and I added, "You, Lord, are much more than my thoughts about You, the boxes I put you in, the customs or gestures, even the ones I find correspondent; You are much more." In that instant, I felt united to all of them, not because of an affinity in thought or language, but because of this point in common: Christ present. What regenerated me was recognizing Him, discovering that my entire life hangs in the balance of His presence. God reached me through a human sign, but it is He who reaches me. One small "symptom" of all I've said is this: I started to be all right no matter where I go and no matter who I am with, and not in a superficial way; in the following days I realized that a certain environment or certain faces were not indispensable for me to be at peace; I started each day desiring that everything could be an instrument of that bond, that relationship with Christ. The month of August was really beautiful. It was a simple choice: when I tried to push that relationship aside, fear and uncertainty, especially about the future, started to well up; when I faced daily circumstances looking for Him, I discovered that only my friendship with Him was capable of making life full.

Carrón. What is the difference between the "belonging" you described and an "association?" We often end up reducing our friendship to an association. What was it that grew in you? It's only after experiencing an overabundance that you realize when something is missing. In your life, what difference have you perceived between a belonging and an association? What are the signs of each?

Matteo. *The sign is what happened next, when I was at home with my parents and my sisters. And I could see the difference because that belonging generates me.*

Carrón. The belonging we're talking about generates a new subject. Participating in an association cannot do that.

Matteo. *The end result is that everything begins to speak to you.*

Carrón. When reality begins to speak to you, it means that belonging to Christ has given you back your life, relationships, everything, but multiplied by infinity: "One hundred times more." Belonging to the Movement doesn't make mountains or beautiful relationships appear, but it allows me to start to see the mountains and relationships in a new way. It was all there before, but it didn't speak to me, like Fr. Giussani's fossils. A person only becomes aware of the depths of reality when he belongs to the One who makes reality, when His presence enters into his life. Then, all that happens begins to take on such meaning and significance that it's as if it were an entirely different life,

“Even though I felt arid, I went over and introduced myself, saying, ‘I’m here to learn from you, from that excitement I’ve lost.’ It was a fantastic and regenerating experience.”

life in a truer sense. It’s from within this experience that a person comes to say, “I don’t belong to CL like you’d belong to an association; by belonging to CL, I belong to the One who I see regenerating my life, I am His.” It’s wonderful, because it’s something you begin to discover in the thick of what you’re living. I could have given a beautiful meditation to tell you that you are His, but it wouldn’t have brought you to the point where you’ve now arrived, having made your own discovery. What is always amazing to me is that, by wholeheartedly following what the Movement proposes, you see the things we’re talking about revealed right in the thick of what you’re living as your own discovery. This is what it looks like when a new “I” is generated. Participating in an association does not produce that newness in your person that reverberates in any and every situation in life. Lots of people go to the mountains and enjoy it, but when they get back to the humdrum of daily or family life, or daily relationships, they’re always dreaming of going back to the mountains, because nothing has changed inside them. In contrast, the experience we’re describing is this: by belonging to a concrete, historical reality, we are given our whole life back, in a way so powerful that we are the first to be surprised.

Chiara. *I’d like to share three facts, in chronological order. The first happened when I was preparing for the vacation. In working with others to organize it, I found myself saying, “My desire is that the vacation and all that we do become an instrument that educates our gaze not to focus so much on our well-documented misery but rather on what He is doing to win me over, as a man does with the woman he loves.” I’ll describe the day I saw this desire, which then changed me little by little, start to take shape. It had been a rough day, and I hadn’t managed to prepare for a dinner we were having to plan for an event at the vacation (a book presentation), so I was feeling a little down. I wrote to the friend who I’d asked to take charge of the event to say I wasn’t coming because I wasn’t prepared. “All right,” she responded, adding, “Thank you for having asked me to do this, because it’s exactly what I need right now.” Her answer stung: I looked at myself and realized that, at that moment, I had a very different attitude than she did, an attitude I wanted to*

have. I wrote back to her right away saying, “I’ll be there.” It was a time I decided not to go with the way I’m always trying to measure myself, but rather let the desire for beauty, the desire to learn from her, win out. I realized that wholeheartedly following that untiring desire for beauty and for relationships is the way I can let Him come to meet me, and I want to continue to do so. The second fact that occurred was when I saw what we were talking about before happening to me: how I am generated in this place, how I learn to do my heart justice. During one assembly, one of the things that came out, among others, was the difference between proactively following your heart and being carried away by emotion. Something interesting happened to me related to that difference. We went on a hike, and I spent the entire morning trying to look at things in wonder, but nothing really drew me in. Lunchtime came—it was the one opportunity for me to meet the incoming freshmen, but I had nothing to say, I felt arid. In light of what came out in the assembly, however, I said to myself: “This is the only time I have to see them; I’m going.” I went over and introduced myself, saying, “I’m here to learn from you, from that excitement I’ve lost.” It was a fantastic and regenerative experience. That circumstance helped me take a step forward: my “yes” is no longer bound to the times when I feel inspired and excited; Christ, provoking me in many ways, is capable of bringing forth fullness even from my aridity, if I follow the provocations. That expression which has so often annoyed me, “Expect a journey, not a miracle,” is now becoming the most beautiful thing I’ve heard because it pushes me to be open to how He keeps me company in every instant, not just when I feel good. All this has also borne fruit at home, not because I’m capable of upholding certain standards, but because I’m more aware of how He chooses me. The last fact demonstrates this: I was coming back from the mountains with my brother (we had each been at our own community vacations); I was tired, I was driving, and I thought, “Now I can finally unwind.” As I was already dreaming of that “reduced” kind of relaxation my brother, totally unaware, said to me, “Chiara, let’s help each other not waste time the rest of the summer. Let’s wake up at a reasonable hour and maybe say Morning Prayer together.” I immediately said, “Yes, thank you!” For me, that’s not nothing. It’s as if I were with that scientist with the fossils. Instead of saying, “Why didn’t I realize there were fossils there?” I said, “How beautiful that he could help me see them.”

Carrón. We need to cherish these things that have been given to each person who speaks. You can't take it for granted. So often, as Chiara was saying, we dwell on our misery or on our own measure. Who here doesn't? Raise your hand! We all do it. Recognizing that, instead of dwelling on our own misery, what's not going well, or what we aren't able to do, which depresses us, it's more intelligent to focus on "all He is doing to win me over," which means discovering a new method. Often we think we are improving because we analyze our misery and try to overcome it; we try to change. She discovered that, instead, it is better for her to let herself be won over by the initiative of a Presence, even if, at the beginning, as it was for her with the dinner, her instinct was not to go. Thanks to the conversation with her friend, she said, "I'll be there." What changes her? As she said, the modality Christ used to call her, that circumstance, "won out." We are not capable of achieving the kind of change and fulfillment we desire. All our attempts fall short; they just depress us. Then we begin to see there's another way, Jesus's way: "Come with Me"; "He who follows me will have the hundredfold." How do we follow Him? It's a matter of giving in to the modality He uses to call us. The things coming out now, which might seem unexceptional, are really out of this world; they swim against our typical attitude toward life, turning it on its head and changing our

lives. A person, for example, as she was saying, might hear the word "wonder" and immediately interpret it moralistically, "I tried to look at things in wonder, to conjure up wonder in myself." The result? Nothing. So then, you apply your measure: "I failed to look at things in wonder." But we cannot generate wonder! So she goes to lunch with the new students, even though she didn't feel like it; she felt arid, and is in wonder at what they tell her. A person can only be reborn by following the modality Christ chooses to call her. He calls me, just as he called her that morning. He calls me to go and visit a community, or to come be here with you. We may be more or less "prepared," that's not for us to worry about, nor can we generate a certain kind of energy on our own; but I can always come here, or to School of Community, or elsewhere, no matter how lousy I feel, as a beggar with that affectivity that Fr. Giussani described, waiting to see how Christ will surprise me and call me, to see the modality and the means He will use to regenerate me. Think how much time we waste complaining about aridity, when it is really a question of an Other who breaks into our lives as we never could have imagined. We want to control everything; we say "Christ," but in the end we reduce Him and all He came to bring to us to a series of benchmarks to reach. And if we mistake Christianity for something that just raises the bar for ethical behavior, it will only

further highlight the fact we're not up to the standard. Consequently, we'll end up leaving, saying, "Christianity is wonderful, but I'm incapable of living it; my limitations run too deep." Yet it was Christ Himself who said, "Without Me, you can do nothing." Hearing that is liberating. It's the opposite of what everyone else says: "You can do it; your own strength is enough to achieve all you are seeking." But who can truly believe that? That doesn't mean that it's impossible to be fulfilled in life. There's another way, open to everyone: a presence that comes to meet us, an event that breaks in and changes our lives. When you discover it, you begin to really enjoy life. The mistake is in the way we reduce Christianity. Instead of an event that can happen, as Chiara described, through her brother, through the new students, and through a dinner to which she was invited but didn't want to go, it becomes a system of rules. We kick Christ out of reality. It's as if we said, "He left, He's up in heaven. After the Ascension He took off and now it's up to us," which is what the overwhelming majority of Christians think. "Christ left, leaving us the rules to follow; we have to figure it out." No, He did not leave; He is present through the human reality He chose as His instrument, and instead of changing our minds using theology, He sends us facts through which we can recognize His presence so that He can start to become familiar. It's a question of

our affection, of the poverty of spirit and the open heart we need to follow the lead of the unpredictable ways he happens in our lives, even when we're feeling at our most arid. What does that matter to Him? "Don't you see? I can create a new road, right in the desert of your aridity." The prophets used the image of the desert to represent that internal aridity: "Yes, even in the desert you're in," God says, "I can bring forth new life. Don't you see?" This challenges our reason, our point of view, our attentiveness and affections, everything. I wanted to underline all these things because they're extremely important discoveries it would be a shame if we didn't make. Any one of them is capable of changing life more than a thousand thoughts could. Christ did not make His exit from history, leaving us all alone; He continuously surprises us in reality, in all kinds of daily situations, not only when we're together but everywhere, even without the usual familiar faces nearby, so there are opportunities for something good everywhere we go.

Massimiliano. *This year, in the student housing where I live, I met another guy who is also studying at Catholic University [in Milan]. We became friends, and I wanted to invite him to our vacation. He said yes: "I'll come to see the Movement so that I can get to know you better." His answer amazed me: we've known each other for a year, we eat dinner together about once a week, but in order to get to know me*



he needed to "see the Movement." It's my fifth vacation, so I already knew what we would do, but his being there made everything new: I tried to spend the whole week of the vacation together with him, even through some of the difficulties he had. At the assembly on the last day, he stood up and said, "After meeting Max, I was really curious to come here to Cervinia to see what your movement is like and to better understand his interest in getting to know me, his curiosity. I saw the same thing in many other people here, and I wondered, 'Where does this curiosity to get to know others come from?' I see a lot of people who, in belonging to the Movement, grow closer to the Church and develop this tie to an institution. How possible is it to cultivate relationships with God without the involvement of the Church?" I was struck by the progression of what he said: I met people curious to know who I am; all these people belong to the Movement; what is the source of that curiosity? And then, is the Church really necessary? It made me think of the questions you asked last night, "Why were the people of Palestine looking for Jesus? To add another burden to life?" No, they sought Him because of the same thing that happened to my friend: they encountered certain faces, all connected to a specific group, that looked at them with a curiosity so powerful that it made them ask where it comes from. In my life, I've seen that only Christ can awaken that question, only He has such a power to reawaken a person's "I." And I see the answer to the question about the Church contained in what happened. After the vacation, he came to see me. We may ask why we should belong to the Church, but we find ourselves already living in it. Yesterday, you asked, "How can we remain in God's Church?" And you replied saying that what allows us to remain in God's Church is precisely the same phenomenon that attracted us in the first place.

Carrón. A beautiful example: it's the encounter with a "curious" humanity that engages with the other person, showing a desire to get to know him, that

inspires wonder because what ought to be the norm (that one person really takes an interest in another) is rarely true. That curiosity and interest in another person amazed his friend so much that he couldn't help but wonder, "Where does that come from?" It's a living example of what we were saying before: that our belonging is not merely to a club or an association because it generates an "I" that, in the way it relates to other people, raises a question. It's up to him then, in living and following what he encountered, to recognize the answer.

Bernardo. *I'll share three facts that caught my attention over the summer. The first happened during the community vacation. A girl who studies philosophy had invited her boyfriend to come for the first two days of the vacation. He's not in college; he has a job, and he's not in the Movement. It was the first time he'd come on a vacation like it. For those two days, he stayed with us and participated in all the gestures of the vacation, and then he had to go back to Milan. As soon as he got home, he sent a message to his girlfriend, saying, "I think our relationship changed in those two days," and he added, with disarming simplicity, "Do you know why?" A frank and sincere question. As if to say, "The relationship between the two of us is different now. How is that possible? What intervened to make us, who have been together a long time, treat each other differently?" The question was the result of real wonder; it was the expression of how far his reason was led when he agreed to engage its affective dimension with what was in front of him. The truth of our experience does not lie in our heads, but in something that happens, something that raises this kind of sincere question, first of all in us, and so continues to hold an attraction for us. Another significant event happened in Calabria, where I spent a week with some friends from my department after the community vacation. With us was a sophomore student who grew up in a CL*

family but had distanced himself in high school. Over his two years at the university, he had become progressively attached to a few of us, leading to his decision to go on the community vacation. At the assembly, he described how transformed he felt because of that friendship. In Calabria, we ended up talking about some contentious issues over lunch and dinner, and he, despite being the "last one to arrive," had the position I found most correspondent. Was it just an initial enthusiasm or the euphoria of a convert? I don't think so. I'd say he was judging things with his eyes on an event. A position that's different from all others only starts to emerge when it's connected to something you're living. The third fact was the day together with the Pope in Rome on August 11th. The first evidence of its significance was the happiness I felt going home. What happened to me in those 24 hours? Of course, the Pope's words were important, but the thing that really affected me happened even before hearing them that and was tied to the very fact of our going: waking up at 5:00 in the morning, going on the busiest travel weekend of the whole summer, and returning in the middle of the night. Despite that, what came out that day was the truth of our companionship: that we are together to follow something outside of us. This is the essence of our friendship, which you could see in the fact that very different people—from diverse faculties and with different attitudes and interests—traveled together to listen to one person. I discovered something about the method: I reach the fullness of my life by saying "yes" to a Person who extends an invitation, and all that's needed to follow Him is to commit your heart to a companionship of people

who accept you as you are and who have no reason to be together except for the fact that they share a common destination. The method is that "going fishing with Jesus" that you spoke of to us, a method that seems so crucial for me. What evidence do I have that this is the method? Its correspondence with my heart and how full my heart was going home. "Going fishing with Him" is what helps me most to live right now, and that attitude is starting to enter into the daily battles of my life. Often, my days are marked by struggle; a number of questions are becoming increasingly uncomfortable as time goes on, forcing me to take a position. Still, I can't help but acknowledge that it's precisely these demanding moments, when I realize that I don't have everything under control, which allow me to be more radical in asking myself what I need in order to live. These times of struggle are actually what make me realize how often I think I "know everything" in theory, with the event being something already known, analyzed, and predetermined. There's just one problem: with all that knowledge and by imposing preconditions, I can do no more than put off the experience of fullness: "If this happens, then it'll happen," always pushing it further and further off. But in that case, the present continuously slips through my fingers. It's in the most difficult moments that I realize how insufficient my analyses are: I can spend entire days "prescribing" the medicine I need to stay afloat, but that doesn't free me. I understand that those things I need most begin right where my analyses end; in other words, it's when something outside of me intervenes again. So, I'm grateful that there is always someone inviting me to "go fishing" again.

He messaged his girlfriend: "I think our relationship changed in those two days. Do you know why?"

Carrón. It's impressive how such a simple formula can make such a difference because—look—our choice is very clear: it's Jesus or the Pharisees. If the disciples had decided to go ask the Pharisees instead of going fishing with Jesus, what would they have been given? Rules! It's what we fall back into the second we move away from "going fishing with Him." It's the battle between two paradigms: either Christianity is something I build based on my analyses and my attempts, or it is a reality I run into. The formula, "go fishing with Him" proposes this radical alternative to any attempt to produce Christianity based on your own coherence or efforts. This is the dramatic challenge we face, even if we all know that Christianity is an event and repeat it a hundred times. Bernardo said, "I think I 'know everything.'" It's true—if we had you take a test, I'm convinced the overwhelming majority of you would say Christianity is an "event." We know it's true. Yet he says, "But I'm always putting off that fullness: 'If this would happen,' or 'If that would happen,' and so the present slips through my fingers." Jesus offers us a different and much simpler method, a method that, however, can only be recognized by the simple-hearted, like that friend who came back to the Movement after a few years, or the boyfriend who only needed two days to perceive a change in his relationship with his girlfriend and to ask himself why. It's really something! If someone opened a "relationship institute" to teach how to make a romantic relationship between a boy and a girl truly fulfilling ("one hundred times more") the line would be out the door! Who doesn't want that? But there isn't a school in the world that can generate the hundredfold. This means we're saying something out of this world: that a guy who is not part of the Movement at all, who goes by chance to a community vacation because his girlfriend invited him, cannot help but recognize after just two days that their relationship is different! This is the real defense against nihilism. So the battle begins: between our attempts, our willingness to let ourselves go, our fragility in giving in to nihilism ("It's impossible"), and allowing ourselves to bump into facts that defy all of that. After hearing what we've heard, each

of us has to decide between the two; we're forced to decide—not deciding is itself a decision. That boyfriend went there by chance, but then found himself in the midst of an unimaginable newness; he came across a human reality that made him ask questions. And pay attention that he ran into you, you who often compete to point out your limitations, to highlight your wretchedness; he helps you recognize what it is that you carry (what we carry). Perhaps we're missing something! As you can see, it's not that this human reality we call the Church has to be made up of people without shortcomings in order to interest people. We all have our limitations, but that's not the point, because the things described that happened to that young man also happened to us. This makes it blatantly obvious that the witness we carry of Christ cannot be reduced to our ethical consistency or our good example; that witness is passed on even amidst all our limitations because something new has come into our lives. We still live in the flesh, meaning we make mistakes as we did before, but we can never entirely strip away that newness that has penetrated into the fibers of our being. We still make mistakes, but there's something from outside that, when it entered our lives, generated an unmistakable newness. The sign of this, as Bernardo said about his other friend, is that a person looks at everything "with his eyes on an event," or that you go home happy, as he said of himself, having gone to Rome to see the Pope during the busiest travel week of the year. And he told us why. What makes the method Jesus offers us valid? We see it in its correspondence with our heart. At first, Jesus doesn't appeal to the fact that He is God, but rather solely to the experience of the hundredfold, to that experience of correspondence. "Follow me, because if you follow me, you will receive a hundred times more in life," just as that couple did. In no way does Jesus blackmail us. He gives us a reason: the hundredfold. And when a person sees the hundredfold, he asks himself where it came from, as Bernardo said. We shouldn't try to distance ourselves because the Church has shortcomings; we follow because something is happening in the Church that is greater than the shortcomings we all have.

"That boyfriend went there by chance, but then found himself in the midst of an unimaginable newness. Pay attention that he ran into you, you who so often compete to point out your limitations."

Paolo. I really want to tell you about two facts that have made me a new man, thanks to which it has become clear that the method of “going fishing with the Lord” is the only one that can truly change me. The first goes back to the end of June. I went with a few others to participate in a meeting with the CL community in Chieti. Something unexpected happened right away: five people definitely not in CL came to School of Community. How did they end up there? There’s a backstory. Four of the five were students who had taken a class with a professor who’s in the Movement. At the end of the semester, the group realized they had a desire to go deeper into what had been discussed with the professor. That led to a proposal: a several day “study retreat.” Two-thirds of the class (so nine total; it was a small group) participated. Four of those showed up for School of Community. The meeting started with prayer, singing, a brief summary. The new faces gave each other questioning looks. The leader of the School of Community saw this and turned to them right away saying, “Can I ask you a question? Why are you here? I mean, what is it you found unique, or what attracted you about the professor whose class you took, that was enough to convince you to go to the study retreat and to come here today?” A lively discussion broke out, with a relentless volley of comments and responses. “His teaching style was different”; “He relates to us in a different way”; “Having met him, we feel more connected to each other.” Along with the four students was another young man, the boyfriend of one of them. He, too, wanted to answer the question even though he isn’t in college; he has a job, so he didn’t go to the study retreat and he only came to School of Community because his girlfriend did. “I’m here because I saw the effect that meeting this professor and going on the study retreat had on my girlfriend: it’s not just that she’s changed or different, she’s a new person.” The conversation moved to the next level. “What is the source of that different way of life that attracted you in this way?” “I’d say there’s an underlying



lifestyle choice.” “Yes,” another responded, “but even if there is a lifestyle choice behind it, the question still remains: Where does that choice flow from? And, above all, what sustains it every day? Because a Kantian moral norm isn’t enough motivation to make such a choice or uphold it every day.” A third student interjected, “Honestly, I still don’t get it. I want to understand, and that’s why I’m here.” That was the fact I wanted to share. I was there watching all of it and certain questions naturally came to me: What is happening to these students? Is it not the same thing that happened to me? Is this not what Christianity is?—a group of people attracted by a person, a presence! And don’t I have that same desire, right now, to understand who makes all this happen, exactly as I sought to understand at the beginning? All at once, because of what I was seeing, I found myself asking once again, “Who are You?” That fact swept away all that I thought I already knew about how Christ was going to reach me. I simply gave in to what happened in front of me, following His initiative, and I found myself saying, “It’s You, Lord.” On our way back to Milan in the car, that fact stayed with me, and there was nothing we could say or add, just an overflowing silence. I went to sleep “just waiting to wake up,” as the song says. The next day, I should’ve been dead tired, too exhausted to study based on the early morning and late night the day before. Instead, that next morning everything had that event as its point of departure and I faced my life differently; not because the circumstances had changed, but because I was renewed: I had been generated. The second fact happened during our community vacation. I was reviewing the text of the School of Community with a group of freshmen and one of them said something really simple about those first few days spent together. “I’m happy; I feel loved and I realize that I’m not making any grand efforts; I’m just agreeing to follow what is proposed to me, what’s in front of me.” Hearing her speak, I could’ve thought, “I’ve heard it all before,” but instead I nearly jumped out of my seat. I

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envied her because I desire that same simplicity of heart, that same poverty of spirit or affectivity, and I started to ask for it, to beg for it. And I asked myself, “Do I really believe that, in my life, what changes me and makes me happy is a Person, and not what I have in mind, an impression I have or some success in accomplishing a particular task?” I’ve discovered that it’s Him, the Lord, happening in my life that convinces me that He’s “all in all” (cf. Eph 1:23); I’m not the one who has to convince myself. I can no longer live for anything less than this. His presence is becoming more and more familiar in my life, not because I know more and more things, but because He draws me ever closer through His initiative and convinces me more and more that He is the Lord, that He is everything, that only He can give me that fulfillment, that hundredfold right now.

Carrón. Following Another’s initiative made the girlfriend come back new, and that amazed the boyfriend so much that he followed her all the way to School of Community. It’s as if those first encounters in the Gospels were happening again: Jesus encounters John and Andrew and everything starts from that. The encounters follow one after another: Peter, Philip, Nathaniel... It’s not a fact from the past; the same phenomenon is happening now. That’s how our friend Paolo woke up the next morning “a new man,” with the “event as his point of departure.” Just think of how many things in life leave no trace in us! And, in contrast, what a remarkable change that boyfriend

must’ve seen in his girlfriend to say, “She’s a new person.” He didn’t participate in any of it, but he saw the effect of that time on her: it generated her. It was as if she was born anew, transformed; she was a new creation thanks to that encounter, her immersion in the study retreat. Either we have to erase these things from our memory, or we’re challenged to go to the source. “What is it that attracted you in the person who invited you?” Not just a “lifestyle choice.” But even if it were that, “What sustains that lifestyle choice that no Kantian moral norm could generate?” “I’m here to understand.” As a medieval monk said, “Something so great has happened to us that we will spend our entire lives in understanding it.” The same thing goes for us. So we find ourselves in front of the same choice between our efforts and following, between presumption and poverty of spirit, as Paolo described. He then asks himself, “Do I really believe it’s a Person that changes me?” This is the challenge of faith. “When Christ comes again, will He still find faith on earth” (cf. *Lk 18:8*)? Not people who speak about Christ and Christianity, about the results Christianity has produced, or the artwork that Italian culture is so full of. No, the question Paolo is asking is the same one Jesus asks: “when the Son of Man comes again, will he still find someone who has faith, who recognizes that there is a person right within history who changes him?” He doesn’t ask if he

will find someone capable, because we’re all wretches, but rather someone who still believes, who recognizes His presence. What does Paolo have to say to us? He said that it’s Christ, by happening again, who demonstrates to us that He is “all in all,” and therefore “His presence draws me ever closer.” This is our only chance if we want to stay in God’s Church. We’re not here by accident. If what was just described hadn’t happened to each of us, after awhile we wouldn’t care anymore. So, then, before looking at all our little faults, all the stupid things we do, let’s ask ourselves, “What was it that happened that brought me here?” Recognizing what happened to you will begin to generate a true affection for yourself, a gaze on yourself that’s full of tenderness because of the great esteem Christ has for you. All the mistakes we make cannot keep us from being here. How many of you jumped out of bed full of joy this morning because of that? How many of you woke up complaining about what’s missing, about all the things still going wrong? Paolo woke up the next morning determined by the event that happened. How do you think John and Andrew must’ve woken up the day after meeting Jesus? How do you wake up the day after finding a girlfriend or boyfriend? You’re wretches as before, but what prevails is the presence of the other person. The Mystery, to help us shift our gaze from our misery, our mistakes, our Kantian ideas, comes and



happens again in our lives. Just as He did at the beginning with John and Andrew. At the time, everyone was dominated by a Pharisaic mentality, but that didn't stop Jesus; He didn't complain about how bad the times were, but as Péguy said, he went straight to the point and founded Christianity (C. Péguy, *Lui é qui*, BUR, Milan, 2009, 110): He went and encountered those two men, just as He comes to encounter us in these complex times.

Samuele. *While rereading the Exercises over the summer, I often asked myself where I was in the choice of an ideology or an event. I looked at myself and said, 'I feel pretty good, having made lots of discoveries; I have a problem or two and some wounds, but I'm overall pretty good; there's nothing dramatic keeping me up at night.' This summer I didn't have a moment of doubt like I did in other years, when, left a little more on my own, I found myself overthinking and pulled into a tailspin of circular thinking. This year, I was amazed to realize that, little by little, my thoughts have stopped dominating over my experience.*

Carrón. "My thoughts no longer prevail over my experience." Reality is greater than our ideas, the Pope says. Experience is more powerful than thoughts. The only thing that frees us from our thoughts is an event, something that's more real than our thoughts.

Samuele. *This happened thanks to a number of facts that occurred throughout the year, but above all because of the responsibility I've been given, not so much in terms of things to do, but because it has given me opportunities to be in contact with life at a certain level, with a certain way of using reason and intelligence to look at reality, a reason and intelligence I see bursting inside you and in a lot of students as well.*

Carrón. I hope that this will be true for all of you to whom responsibility is given: that it not be an added burden, but rather an opportunity to see what Christ is doing. The only reason we go to visit friends in other communities, go to School of Community, or participate in certain gestures is to see Him at work. What makes coming here worth it? Where in the world does something like what we're hearing this morning happen? Where? If you find another place that's more interesting, go! And then tell me about it.

Samuele. *Slowly, almost by osmosis, to use a term we all know, this is all becoming mine, day after day, through daily battles and dialogues; year after year, not without struggling and stumbling, because it is too attractive to neglect. At the same time, it's changing me almost in spite of me, without me realizing it, but always with me, through my freedom, raising the bar of my desire and the way I look at ordinary things. I'm understanding that I only need one thing to live: His real presence, Christ who is happening in the present through tangible facts. When Christ is happening, He restores to You things you could not give yourself—fulfillment, and at the same time a need for Him, that wound without which nothing speaks to you, it all goes mute. Living immersed in His presence is really an entirely different life.*

Carrón. We'll close here, but I'd like to pose a question again: what have you perceived that's new this morning? Because this morning was more than an account of facts and events. I'll leave you with that question and I'll meet you "on the other side," to see if we have been attentive to perceiving what the Mystery has given us through those people who spoke. ■