

**Notes from the *Raggio* of Gioventù Studentesca (GS) via video link
with Julián Carrón and Francesco Barberis
May 21, 2020**

Francesco Barberis. Good evening to everyone connecting, both students and teachers.

We begin this *Raggio* (the weekly meeting of Gioventù Studentesca students) full of gratitude that we can direct our questions and concerns, and recount our discoveries, to a father who guides us by his humanity, and guides the journey of GS as a whole. I thank Julián Carrón for giving us this time. Retracing the time that has passed since Pigi and Carrón's lessons on Holy Saturday, I was impressed as I read the 151 contributions received for this *Raggio* (the last few arrived this morning). It is a beautiful sign, first and foremost, of the journey we are embarking upon. One of you says: "This time has been given to me so I can return to the essential." It is precisely this 'essential' that we will discuss today; this is the only thing that interests us. This is why we are so grateful for Julián's presence. We have asked ourselves: "During this time full of new and trying circumstances, remote learning, time spent close to family, distance from friends, and daily challenges, what have you found in yourself, what discoveries have you made, what questions have emerged? In what way were these provocations considered at the Easter event with Pigi and Carrón?" Thanks Julián; the floor is yours.

Julián Carrón. Hello everyone. It is always a pleasure to find oneself speaking about the things that—as Francesco has said—are essential in life. Let's begin.

Hello. In this period, I have found it very difficult to do certain things that were previously far simpler and more immediate, such as doing my homework in the afternoons, or maintaining my focus during video lessons. It feels like it is no longer enough to know that I must do these things; I want to know why I must do them. I want someone to tell me why it is worth doing these things, the reason that my efforts, my struggles, the time that they require, are not in vain. If I do not find, or at least do not try to find, sense in all of this, then I prefer not to do anything. I don't want to waste time and effort for something that is pointless, that doesn't help me, that doesn't make me happy. Therefore, my question is: What is the point of everything I must do? I don't mean just at school, but for the rest as well. Why must I stay in my house? Because someone has told me to? I'm sorry, but this answer is not enough for me. I know that there are so, so many questions, and I am not sure that I will ever have all the answers, but there's no harm in trying. I also don't think I will be able to resist asking someone these questions sooner or later, even if asking them is rather difficult.

Carrón. The first thing we have found in this particularly challenging situation that we have all experienced, with all the features we have seen, is the emergence of questions like the ones you are asking now. Questions emerge within us: the more circumstances challenge us, the more we see that we cannot go on without answers. What is the first thing that you have discovered, the first thing that emerges in front of your eyes, from everything you have said? Not from what you didn't say, but from what you did, What emerges?

I want to know why I want to do things.

Carrón. Yes, this is the question, but you received many answers; What emerged in front of them? You asked yourself: "Do I have to do it because someone asked me to?" And you added: "This answer is not enough for me." So why are you asking me the question?

Because I want to find a reason for doing things.

Carrón. What you have discovered is very beautiful: it is not enough that someone gives you the answers. We are too full of answers; everyone gives us one answer or another. In these

months full of initiatives, you have experienced the consequences of various answers, but from what you are telling me, it seems that none of them have been enough for you. So, what are you discovering on your journey? I think it is fundamental for you to realize the importance of this because so often, begging for some sort of answer, you receive a barrage of answers, but then you ask yourselves: “Do I have to do things just because someone told me to? I’m sorry, but this answer is not enough for me.” So, what next step does what you have discovered suggest? So that it can be truly yours, the answer must be a discovery that you make.

It is also important to know whom to ask these questions of.

Carrón. Yes, but the point is that whether you ask someone you find on the street or someone close to you, during this time in which you have received many answers, what has emerged is that receiving an answer is not enough. For you to truly find an answer, you must discover it yourself. I can offer you a suggestion, suggest a particular initiative, but in the end—I think what you say is amazing—if you do not discover the answer yourself, it is not enough for you. This indicates something fundamental: to grow, you must take your own lives in hand and try to find answers that convince you: otherwise, nothing will be enough for you. You must find the reasons for doing the things you must do. You ask: “Why must I stay at home? Why must I study? Why do I have to do this or that?” Don’t do it then—who is making you? Don’t study—is anyone making you? Why do you do it?

I do it more out of habit than anything else.

Carrón. Of course, but this ‘doing things out of habit’ will not give you an adequate reason for doing things. Notwithstanding, you stay at home, study, and do things anyway. Why?

Because maybe there is some sense in doing them, and I want to discover it.

Carrón. So, you already have a reason to begin. Maybe it is worth your while to risk doing things, to see if there is sense in it. Otherwise, on the one hand, you will wait for someone to give you an answer; on the other, you will say: “It is not enough that someone tells me to do it.” If you watch a bullfight from the stands, or a match from the balcony, you will always have something to complain about. Involve yourself! If you do not discover your motivations yourself, no one will ever be able to give you adequate reasons for acting in a certain way. A few months ago, at an event for graduating students, a girl said: “I want to study medicine, but I don’t want to waste time over the summer studying for the exam, because summer is summer!” I said: “Who is making you do it? Go to the seaside. Why do you have to sit for the exam? Go to the seaside.” She replied immediately “but I want to study medicine!” “So study! Who is stopping you?” Do not wait for someone to convince you. I did not try to convince her, just as I am not trying to convince you now. Instead, I threw her off balance by asking her the question, Why? Because it is useless to try and convince you of my ideas, just as it was useless to try and convince that girl in words that it was better to study than go to the seaside. But as soon as I challenged her with “go to the seaside, who is stopping you?” she discovered, from within her own experience, that it was worth studying for the exam. She had discovered the reason: to study medicine. The adequate motivation appeared to her immediately, with clarity. Do you understand why Jesus challenged the disciples instead of responding to their questions immediately? They, too, must have complained to Jesus when they saw that everyone had left (John 6: 66–67). Maybe they asked him: “Give us a reason to stay with you.” But Jesus posed a question to them: “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus challenged them, and this was the opportunity Peter needed to rediscover his reason for following Him. There was no need for Jesus to issue a command. The lived experience Peter shared with Him convinced him, and was a sufficient reason to stay: “To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). After having challenged him, Jesus waited for Peter to discover this. This is why in this period your experience is beautiful if you acknowledge its import: it is not enough for you to do things just because someone tells you to. When you ask a question, the other collaborates with you, offering you a hypothesis to work on: “Look and see whether my

suggestion can help you discover the reasons for doing something.” But it must then be a discovery of your own that moves you to action; it must emerge from within you, from within your experience, from a human correspondence that you discover. It is quite an adventure! You will all thus begin to understand that it not sufficient to unload your expectation of an answer onto someone else, whoever it may be, because this will not be enough for you. Sometimes, it is necessary to struggle in order to become aware of reality.

Hello everyone. On May 4, when the authorities allowed us to begin moving around more freely, I went for a run not far from my home; it is my weekly workout that I have been doing for years. This time however, it was different. In fact, while running near a hill that I had gone past countless times (!), I became amazed by the beauty of the scenery, of the lush green plants, and even of the singing of crickets; things that, previously, I had never stopped to notice. Even though I usually dislike running alone (though at present I have no choice), at that moment I did not desire anything more than what I was experiencing. I was aware of what I had, rather than what I could have had. A few days later, speaking of this experience at School of Community, a question emerged: “Why? Why, in that moment, was I amazed by the beauty of reality, while so often, it doesn’t happen?”

Carrón. And what answer did you begin to give yourself? After what I have just said to our friend who spoke before you, we cannot go backwards. The answer must be something you discover yourselves.

I think that reality imposed itself in that moment.

Carrón. And why did reality impose itself on that occasion? That same reality was there before; you had run the same route many times, seen the same things, the same beauty, but you had not noticed it.

Perhaps in that moment I was more attentive.

Carrón. Perfect. You were first of all more attentive. And what made you more attentive? We must become aware of how things happen. Why do you think you were more attentive? During this period of confinement, did you train yourself to do this somehow? Done any particular exercises?

No, no.

Carrón. So, where did this attention come from?

From a desire to be surprised.

Carrón. That morning, when you were still at home, did you say to yourself: “Now I am going to train myself to be surprised by this morning” and then surprise yourself? The first thing that happened was an observation: you had run that route many times, but you had never been as surprised as you were in that moment. What has this got to do with everything that you have experienced recently, when you could not run because you were confined to your house? Do you think these two things are related?

When we cannot do everyday things for a certain period of time, it is as if they become new once again when we return to them. They are still the same things, but after weeks of inactivity, a desire to go running returns; the idea of going for a run is no longer taken for granted. This is why you were more surprised than ever before by what had always been there, right in front of you. Thus, being forced to stay put, as we all were, to exist without the same freedom, generated a desire and attentiveness within you. It meant that when you were finally able to run your old route again, you were surprised by what was there, by what you had not noticed before. I have always been greatly struck by a phrase from don Giussani—which I quoted in a *Corriere della Sera* article to help us all face the coronavirus challenge together: “If an individual were to barely live the impact with reality, because, for example, he had not had to struggle, he would scarcely possess a sense of his own consciousness, would be less aware of his reason's energy and vibration” (*The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen’s University Press,

1997, p. 100). In other words, we are not amazed by what we have right in front of us. The struggle you endured has trained you, in a way—this is true training—to develop a level of attentiveness that you did not have before. See: when we accept the provocation of reality, everything is useful. Why was it worth your while to accept the situation imposed upon you by the virus, the fact that you could not leave your house? Because it enabled you to acquire a level of attentiveness that you previously did not have.

If, instead of complaining about a circumstance—whatever it may be—we accept it, embracing the way in which reality reaches us, then we may be surprised to see that reality speaks to us more than we think, and we may notice things that we were never surprised by in the past. This is the advantage we can obtain from accepting the way in which reality provokes us. And we can see that we benefit from it because when we return to normal circumstances, we are struck by what we previously took for granted; it surprises us. Thus, any situation can become an opportunity to educate ourselves. When we benefit in this way, we immediately realize what it means for us: reality speaks to us more than we had imagined. It is impressive that you were so surprised by something so familiar; it is as if you saw it entirely anew, and as if it spoke to you more, amazed you more.

What does this have to do with don Giussani's call to "live reality intensely"?

Hello. In the last few days I have realized that despite trying to make everything run smoothly—doing my homework in a certain way, paying attention during lessons (as hard as this currently is), and behaving well—this is not enough. There have been days in which I've done my duty, but was dissatisfied nevertheless, as if I were lacking something, a part of the big equation of life. The question that thus emerged overwhelmingly was: If not even doing things in the right manner is enough to be happy, then what is the point? Why, even when I live comfortably with my friends and family, do I feel alone and lost so often? Why, even if I am doing everything correctly, do I sometimes feel that I have nothing to show for it? I have realized often that I do everything well but am not happy; whereas, sometimes, something might go wrong, I might have argued with someone or simply not paid attention in a lesson as I would have wished, but I am a hundred times happier than when I behave perfectly.

Carrón. Ok, first of all, what does this tell you about yourself, what does it make you discover about yourself?

That often what makes us happy are not our own efforts.

Carrón. What makes us happy is not produced by our own actions; what corresponds completely to your desires it not something you do yourself—this emerges clearly in what you have said. Even if you do everything correctly, this is not enough, because your desire is much greater. It is so important to realize this; otherwise, we remain shocked: "How can this be? I've done everything perfectly, but it is not enough?" Yes, because "all this is small and insignificant compared to the capacity of one's own mind," says Leopardi (*Pensieri LXVIII*, trans. W.S. Di Piero, Louisiana State University Press, 1981, p. 113). Everything we do is too small in comparison to the desires of the heart. If one does not understand this, one might reach the point of saying "It is better not to bother." No—you must understand why it is necessary to do things, first of all. Secondly, we must leave these questions open: If it is not what I do that makes me happy, then what truly makes me happy? What is equal to all my need for happiness? What we must truly discover—and this is the great adventure of life, no?—is what is capable of filling the heart, of giving me that fullness that my heart is hoping for, has always been longing for. Ask yourself: When you have experienced moments of fullness, what did you discover? What filled your heart?

I don't exactly know, but...

Carrón. Don't worry about not knowing how to express it now—leave the question open so that, starting from now, when it happens, you will be able to say: “Ah, this is what I desired.” But maybe you already have some intuition of this now.

Yes, more or less.

Carrón. Try. We are among friends.

Often I feel truly happy when I have people alongside me who help me to be happy.

Carrón. This already reveals to you that what makes you happy is not your efforts, but presences that are more equal to your needs. Are all presences the same? Do all people make you equally happy? You know lots of people, no?

Yes. There are some who are more important, and others who are less important.

Carrón. Perfect! Why are some important, and others less so? What do those who are important offer? This is a fascinating adventure, guys! Not everything is the same. Everything is not at all the same! If we are attentive—as we said before—we begin to realize that, even when we do things well, it is not enough for us, it is too little; we begin to perceive that we are truly happy when there are certain presences, which are not all the same and in which there is a difference from one to another. We thus begin to perceive that certain presences contain something that fills the heart more than others; they have a way of placing themselves into reality that is particularly important for us. With the help of these presences, ordinary things can be done in a different way.

Today at lunch I was told a story. There is a young man who has finished university and is now working; his father—both are working at home because of the coronavirus—was so struck by how his son lived and worked at home that he moved to work in the space where his son was working, to be there with him. Not to avoid working, but to be as attentive to his work as his son was—he has so many more hours' experience than his son, and yet cannot do this—and learn to work like him. There is no contradiction between the things we must do and these presences because they are presences that give us a reason and which enable us to do what we must do. You are not dependent on the fact that things must go well, but instead are dependent on something that has happened to you—an encounter with certain presences which sustain you and make even studying and working more palatable. Everything is united, and at the end of the day, one finds oneself more fulfilled. One begins to perceive that there is a unity in life and that when one encounters certain presences that facilitate one's relationship with what must be done, one becomes more fulfilled. In this way, you can start to find an answer, to identify an answer, to your question. I believe this is fundamental because whoever wishes to “live reality intensely” must pay attention to where this happens, where there are people who live reality intensely and to harness their energy, as that father did, who could have said: “Being a father, I can't become a ‘son’ to my own son.” Instead, he had the simplicity to not be scandalized by the fact that he could learn from his son despite being older; he thus made himself a “son” to his own son. We must learn this simplicity. As I learn from someone in whom I see life exploding, I will become “infected” by this way of life. So, what is the value of these presences?

In quarantine I have frequently found myself thinking of a line by the rapper Marracash: “I fill time, but not the emptiness” (“Tutto Questo Niente – Gli occhi” [All this nothingness—the eyes], 2019, © Universal Music). I have a lot of things going on and even manage to study well; time passes, but my heart is often bored, tired, and used to not asking itself anything anymore. I often get to the end of the day and ask myself: “You've done lots of things, but are these enough to live?” In the last few weeks, I have been pulled out of this nothingness by certain “friendly presences” who have helped me be an adult in front of reality. Moments such as the School of Community and conversations with close friends continually wake me up and help me understand that I want to live as fully as possible, even in the current situation. A

“*brief flame*” is not enough; I am looking for something that lasts throughout every day whether I am confined to my home or not. However, in this period, I am more distracted than ever, and fall into my own worries and problems. I therefore ask myself: “How can we be adults in these circumstances? And be adults permanently?”

Carrón. Wonderful! Marracash has grasped the point of living: “I fill time, but not the emptiness.” We can fill our time with many things, but we don’t always manage to fill the emptiness that we have within us. For many, this is simply a misfortune, but for someone who loves him or herself, it is the sign—as we said before—of the greatness of our “I.” We can fill our time by doing many things, but we cannot trick our heart; the emptiness it feels is not filled by what we can imagine or do ourselves—it is filled by something that we must discover. What is the hint that those things are not the answer? That I get bored. If we are attentive to how things happen in our experience, we will have all the necessary factors to continue on our journey. In fact, as soon as you get bored, you say: “It is not this.” So, you continue to look for what might help you, with more attentiveness than before. This is how you begin to realize that often you are pulled out of this emptiness by certain friendly presences, and you go forward with them.

Initially, as you have seen, there may be moments in which you say, “I am not happy with merely filling time,” and other moments in which you begin to see the splendor of the beginnings of an answer. The question is how these moments can become more frequent. This is what don Giussani always encouraged us toward. We await a miracle, that everything will happen instantly; instead, sometimes something will occur in certain moments, but these moments are not enough to satisfy all the need we have in our heart. We want them to become increasingly frequent. This is why don Giussani tell us, “Expect a journey, not a miracle that gets you out of your responsibilities or neutralizes your struggle, making your freedom mechanical” (L. Giussani, *Raduno nazionale maturati*, Rimini, September 28-30, 1982, in A. Savorana, *Life of Luigi Giussani*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017, pp. 634-35). It is necessary to follow these friendly presences; this is the decision that needs to be taken in such a way that their way of life may slowly become ours, too. It is these presences that pull us out of our distraction and reopen our attitude when we are worried, so that we do not remain confined by our concerns. We see Jesus do this all the time with his friends. Although they have seen huge miracles like the multiplication of the bread and fish, back on the boat they argue and forget about the bread. How does Jesus help them (Mark 8:19-21)? He does not carry out another miracle—this would have been easy for him, no?—but he helps them to make a step forward in knowledge: “Do you not understand that the problem is your relationship with me, a relationship that could pull you out of your distraction?”

The problem is that a place is needed where my life can be constantly reclaimed; thus, Jesus says: “If you agree to follow me, if you agree to follow my friendship, to participate in my friendship, you will slowly discover that it becomes yours.” This is a journey we can decide to embark upon or not. It depends on our freedom. The fact that these moments appear already means that there is an answer, that we are not left in darkness. It’s like when someone manages to solve a math problem and then gets something else wrong; the fact that he managed once means that he can learn, but only if he embarks upon a journey, only if he is accompanied by someone who helps him on that journey, until he realizes that it has become his. We cannot learn everything all in one go. This is the invitation we extend to one another, the invitation that Jesus extends to us: to pursue a modality by which what is offered to us will become ours. Yet often we are impatient: if everything does not happen here and now, immediately, we become suspicious. No! We cannot learn everything in one go, just as you cannot learn all of mathematics all in one go—we can understand this easily. If we accept this method, a method that is more appropriate to our life, slowly, over time, it will increasingly become ours. You already have the signs of this, you have experienced moments in which the answer has been

seen. Yet in this circumstance we have been asked to face—the pandemic—the question of evil appears particularly urgent.

Hello. Where does this suffering come from? Why does God allow it to exist, given that He only wants what is good for us? What is he asking of us by making us face this suffering that He is mysteriously allowing to exist? What goodness is He asking me to discover, or rediscover? The attentiveness I feel myself lacking the most is that of being aware of the questions God is asking me through this circumstance, and what He is calling me toward. In any case, I am well and I am happy, even if I am struggling. I carry with me the certainty of the fact that I am loved, even in moments of sadness. I think that this period has involved moving along a great learning curve. I cannot control my own life, nothing depends on me, but I can love life and the people that continue to be given to me.

Carrón. How does what you have discovered answer your question? “Where does this suffering come from?” It is not enough to ask a question and then forget it. If what you have said does not answer that question, it means that what you are experiencing does not help you with an answer. Your question will emerge again, and everything you have recounted will not help you. What have you discovered in this period that can answer the questions “Where does evil come from?” and “Why does God allow it to exist, given that He only wants what is good for us?” starting from what you have said? We must not ignore our questions because they are crucial for the journey of life. Suffering, What is suffering? Something that does not make you feel good. And what did you say makes you feel good?

The fact that I am loved.

Carrón. Perfect! Simple. You all make incredible discoveries, but the point is that often you do not realize this. Why did God make us? He made us at the beginning of time in order to have a creature with whom He could share His happiness. God created man in a close, familiar relationship with Him; as Genesis tells us, to share everything that He had created. Even the Lord was amazed by how beautiful it was: “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). Yet since He wanted to be loved freely—like me and you—man can say yes or no to this love. And when man says no, what situation does he find himself in? He suffers. When you say no to love, how do you feel? You suffer. Do you see where suffering comes from? From saying no to that which is for your good, to the good meant for you.

Suffering enters history through a choice made by human freedom, which, instead of pursuing the goodness that makes the “I” truly itself, disregards that which constitutes man’s goodness and decides to move away from the One who loves him. Then one suffers. Suffering enters life when I lose my awareness of being loved. When one regains the awareness of being loved, one begins to see things differently. Yet since God does not wish to impose His love, He leaves you free to decide to accept it or not; He continues to seek you out again and again because he does not want to impose Himself on you. The entire problem of living is the question of how much time we need to discover that only by belonging to Him who *is* goodness can we truly be happy and content. In any case, He grants us all the time in the world because He does not want to impose His goodness. Often we are amazed by this, and say: “Why does God allow this?” Why does God not want to enter like a bull in the china shop of your freedom to stop you every time you do something contrary to your own good? Because if He acted like this, His goodness would never become truly yours. Would you prefer to be loved freely or would you prefer that the person you love loved you mechanically in case he made a mistake and made you suffer? What would you prefer?

To be loved freely.

Carrón. And do you think God has worse taste than you? He, too, prefers to be loved freely. If we were not loved freely, it would not be love; if we could not love freely, it would not be

love. This is why, sometimes, we suffer the consequences of our choices, or those of others, and suffer; but God waits for us, like the father of the Prodigal Son, awaiting his son's free choice to return home. He did not tie him to a chair to stop him from making mistakes, to stop him from leaving home and ending up eating with the animals, to stop him from generating suffering. This is the sign of the great love that He has for our freedom: He wishes to be loved freely, just as you wish to be loved freely. And when you realize that you can "love life and the people that continue to be given to you," you will find goodness again. In this sense, this period does present a great learning curve involving the realization that to be truly happy, you must allow yourself to be loved. Only then, when you accept the people that are given to you, that love you, will you begin to be happy, and will the suffering that separates you from others begin to be defeated. What happens with people happened with Jesus, too. This is why the disciples stayed with Him—they weren't stupid! They made errors, thinking that it would be better to do things their way, but they slowly realized that only by staying by His side would life become truly fulfilling. This is the patience that He has for us. What has this got to do with religiosity?

Hello. One of my closest friends, a priest, has been continually asking me during this period if I've been praying. He's asked me every time he's written to me, what I was praying for and when, almost as if the only way to hear God and to talk to Him were that, almost like a duty. Initially, I listened to his advice and tried to pray even when I didn't feel like it or when I was busy with other things. Then I realized that the more I prayed, the more I felt that what I was doing was inadequate, as if Christianity wasn't for me, as if God were alien to me. The same thing is happening with my studies, with my video lessons, with my friends, with everything and everyone. Why do I feel so inadequate? I do not know where to find the answer to this question in the things that are happening to me, in this increasingly oppressive situation, to the point that I am almost gasping for breath.

Carrón. Do you see that the answer is not something we discover ourselves, that we cannot defeat this alienation from things by ourselves? Nothing can be imposed. This is why God loves our freedom so much, because if God does not enter our being freely, we will not enjoy His presence, and everything will end up feeling alien to us: even a relationship with Him in prayer. We must thus discover, from within our experience, when things emerge in us with all their power. In some instances, did you find yourself praying—as your priest friend suggested—as a gesture coming from an urgent need?

Yes.

Carrón. Was there any difference?

Yes, there was some difference.

Carrón. We pray because we need to. When prayer is born of a need, it does not feel alien. But for you to perceive your need, something must occur which makes you recognize it. Imagine having to go to the dentist: you don't want to go, you can cancel the appointment, it's a real pain to have to go, it's a thing you "have" to do. But if you suddenly experienced a toothache, would you still debate whether to go or not? Would it seem alien then to go to the dentist?

No.

Carrón. No. Why? Because it would come from an urgent need that you have. Thus, if we do not discover that prayer emerges from our needs, we will experience it as something imposed on us. The same goes for your studies: if I do not understand why I need to study, my "I don't want to" will prevail. "Who is making you? Don't study, go to work." "No, because I want to learn." "So you have a reason to study." Only when we allow ourselves to be challenged by reality can we discover one reason after another; when our actions stem from our need, then we have an adequate reason to do things. This is necessary if we want to embark on a human

journey; otherwise, everything seems oppressive because we lack adequate reasons for doing anything. Only if we start from our experience can we understand ourselves; otherwise, we will just consider our own ideas. It's like the girl who told me she wanted to study medicine, as I mentioned earlier. It's as if it's up to us adults to make you go to the dentist! You would not go. It's as if it's up to us to make you study! You would not study. But if you ask yourself, "Who is making me do this?" and you say: "I want to do this for when I am older and working in a place where I can dedicate myself to others," thereby discovering the reasons, you will see that the effort you make is not oppressive. If you do nothing now and do not study now, will life be easier for you in future?

No.

Carrón. You simply delay the issue. This is why it is so important to use these questions to discover the reasons why our actions need not be oppressive. This is not "getting in your head" about it, it is asking: "Why do I do this?" An "I" is needed to live, not a robot that receives orders from a control tower into the terminal of its head. If you do not have an affection for yourselves, a passion for your destiny, a passion for your own happiness, what is the point? No one can make you do anything. This is why we spend time together, to not be spared from this path; otherwise, as we said at the start, it is not enough that someone else tells us to do things. We are together so as to not spare one another from the urgency of answering these questions. And when you desire to live according to these needs, you start to ask yourself: "Where can I find people who want to go where I want to go? Where can I find people who study? Where do I see people who answer that need? Where do I see people who do not just pray as a force of habit? Where do I see people who are entirely engaged in what they are doing? Who find joy in what they do, and are not oppressed by it?" That is where the adventure begins—it is a problem of attentiveness; in fact, not all the people you will find on your journey will want to live like you do. The first question is whether you choose to pursue your destiny with those who want to go where you do—and support one another in this fantastic adventure of life—with those who care about their destiny, their own fulfilment. Why would we spend time together if not for this? What reason do we have if not to help one another reciprocally to walk toward that which fulfills life, our destiny? It would not be reasonable and would become oppressive. Don't you think?

Hello. I can recall some notable moments from quarantine in which I have said "You" with a concreteness I have never expressed previously. I am still timid and insecure for various reasons, but I am not worried about that. I think that will take time. I realize that there have been evident instances of this dialogue with the Mystery, of this self-consciousness, but I still don't fully understand what it means. The point is that I need the awareness to pray with sincerity...

Carrón. See?

To ask with sincerity. Otherwise, it becomes something automatic, and I am not present in my asking. It is as if I perceive this lack of awareness as a barrenness. But how can it be part of a relationship, rather than a sort of parenthesis? How can this lack of dialogue become a dialogue? There is a question that I read in the notes from the School of Community with you (from May 6) that overwhelmed me with how much it rang true: "Is there something you are defending from Me because you are frightened that I could not win there?" Someone said this who was feeling interrogated by Jesus. Without going into details, I can recall situations in my life that, a little automatically, I have tried to block out, because they feel like dead ends. I say yes to many challenges because they are open and do not yet have an answer. Certain words keep coming back to me, perhaps spoken by you, Carrón: that everything is part of the journey.

Carrón. Everything is part of the journey. Do you agree?

Yes.

Carrón. So?

So there is no need to block anything out. It might not be automatic to act in this way, but to be completely truthful, I must understand everything.

Carrón. Exactly, but this will happen in time. This is crucial for us; often we do not realize the value of time, and we want everything here and now, as I said earlier. Things become ours slowly because this is the method that most suits our human nature. If a teacher claimed to be able to teach you everything in a short space of time, it would be useless, because it would not enable you to understand. The Mystery bends to our nature so as not to force itself upon us. But so often we perceive this as something “less,” because things don’t happen immediately; instead, it is a sign of the Mystery’s tenderness, giving us the time we need to take each human step. This is why there are clear moments in which we are present with our whole selves and others in which we are simply not there. But instead of berating yourself, see it as an opportunity: “It’s just as well, Mystery, that you remind me when I am distracted; just as well that you can take me back again.” This makes you grateful that the Mystery takes this initiative with you, and says to you “Do you not miss me?” This is why you were struck by the question posed at the School of Community referring to Jesus: “Is there something you are defending from Me because you are frightened that I could not win there?” We beat ourselves up, berate ourselves, and He comes with all His tenderness and says: “Why are you afraid, if I am here? Will you let me back in?” We can thus transform these moments from pretexts to reproach ourselves to opportunities to be surprised that there is still someone who loves our nothingness. *It is not a case of berating myself, actually. It’s what you said before, I think: I require something to make me aware of my need, so that my question can be sincere.*

Carrón. What has made you aware of your need?

All these contributions, this event.

Carrón. See? The only thing to do, when this happens, is to pursue it. It is as if the Mystery is saying to you: “Why are you afraid? See how in a moment of School of Community, through an event like this, a moment of prayer, through any circumstance, I can always visit you so as to not leave you alone with your nothingness?” The most astonishing thing is that we are beggars; the most astonishing thing is discovering that He is always there, that He returns, that he never stops searching for us. It is as if one can forget about distractions and be filled with wonder: “Do you really still take pity on me?” It is like when you are loved: you get into all sorts of trouble, but the person who loves you still searches for you, and this eventually will amaze you. It is what we can see in the School of Community in the figure of Peter. He gets into all sorts of trouble, and the last is huge: he denies knowing Christ three times. When he sees Him risen, he must have thought—as happens to us often—“Who knows how he will tell me off!” Instead, nothing; not even a mention. Jesus wrong-foots him: “Do you love me?” If, instead of wasting time complaining about what is not right in us, we allowed ourselves to be always overwhelmed by this “Do you love me?”, it would be a different story. Our wonder would increase. This is what we must return to, that chapter on Peter’s yes. Since we also get into all sorts of trouble, we constantly need to be reached by Christ’s gaze on Peter, which don Giussani describes in such a unique way. Without returning to that, we will inevitably treat each other badly.

Hello. The other day I went outside for the first time because I had to get some books from school. I expected to really enjoy that hour of freedom, but the impact with this “new” reality totally wrong-footed me. Even the janitor, the simplest person in the world, looked at me as if to say: “I’m not sure that you are healthy, so keep your distance.” Faced with this fear, loads of questions emerged in me: How can I accept this circumstance without just resigning myself to the fact that it will be like this? How can I learn to say yes to this reality, which has undoubtedly proved more daunting than what we had imagined? The times that lie in wait for

us frighten me, and I don't think I can accept them; on the other hand, I don't want to reduce them all to habit, otherwise I will miss out on things. How can I accept today's reality without reducing it to my fear?

Carrón. Perfect, this is the challenge we are currently faced with because once distrust has been established, as you saw in the janitor, we cannot just say: "Now we will re-establish trust." It is not enough to say this. What can provide us with the trust we need to start again? "Restarting" is the order of the day now.

I don't know; perhaps realizing that there is not just this fear, but more than that.

Carrón. Most of all, you must realize what has been most crucial for you in the dynamics among us, which we have all seen. What struck you the most? Then I will tell you what has struck me the most.

I was struck by the fact that sometimes I had to ask for help to go on because I couldn't manage alone.

Carrón. Do you know what struck me? Let's recall the opening words of the School of Community at the start of the year: just as we can all become potential carriers of the virus and are all so fragile, and seeing our vulnerability as everything separates us from others, there is Someone who takes care of us. "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" says Psalm 8, often quoted by don Giussani. There is Someone who loves us even if we have contracted the virus, who loves us in spite of all of our sin, who loves us even when we do not trust Him. If one does not have a present experience of this ultimate positivity of a presence in which one can place all of one's trust, it will be difficult to defeat with reasoning a mistrust that has snuck into the folds of our lives. Only by being emboldened by this awareness of being so preferred, by being so bowled over by Christ's unique preference for us, can we move closer to others once again while adhering to all the safety rules. We will not be defeated by mistrust only because there is One who testifies that nothing can separate us from Him. What certainty would Saint Paul have if he were with us now during this pandemic? That nothing could separate him from Christ's love for him (Romans 8:35-39). Only this can defeat the mistrust that has been created.

It is as if everything that we have experienced that has forced us to be distant from one another has generated another virus—mistrust—and we need to see what can now defeat it. Whoever has already experienced what defeats mistrust, or has begun to defeat it in this time of confinement to our homes, will be more trained, able to greet the janitor happily even if she withdraws, or to greet friends and classmates with trust, because we are not defined by mistrust as long as there is Someone who defeats it. We must verify whether everything that the Mystery has not spared us in order to help us live, educate us, and generate our "I" may give us something to share with others now that things are getting underway again. We must verify whether we are not carriers of the virus of mistrust, but rather carriers of the antivirus of trust in the relationships among us, so that we can continue building what we have seen occur in many moments over the last months. It is more beautiful when we are together, when life does not separate us from others or introduce distance.

Now is the time to bridge the distance that has arisen. How? With a love, a passion for the lives of others, which we can only receive from Him who has love and passion for us, just like the first Christians: they were so defined by what they had encountered and received every day from Christ that they could move toward others without fear. Verifying what we have experienced in these days of isolation is a great challenge and a unique opportunity to face the next phase so that we can fully understand why we have been spared nothing.

Barberis. Julián, allow me to say two things. The first is technical; I have been advised by the organizers and also received messages saying that my introduction was not heard. I just wanted to assure you all that you didn't miss anything! The beauty of today has been precisely this

possibility of dialogue, to see and hear a dialogue between you and the students who have taken part. The second is what I have learned from listening today: we need an “I” in order to live as adults. We have seen it in you over the last hour. As you spoke, I thought about how we may understand ten things in life, or a hundred, but also about how novelty does not come, first and foremost, from dialectic, intellectual understanding. It comes from the possibility of presences that, through their way of living, testify to a positivity that was previously inconceivable. Today I saw it again: I am infinitely grateful. I think this is also how we accompany one another, not with a bunch of initiatives of some sort, but mainly by testifying about this grace of a changed humanity to one another.

Before concluding, I wanted to ask you for help, Julián, on the question of the summer holidays, which will not take place, just as the Czestochowa graduation pilgrimage will also not occur. Can you help us to understand this, too?

Carrón. We did not decide that the challenge of coronavirus should last until the holidays. In the last few months, we have already seen that when we accept the unexpected in life, it can become an opportunity to grow. We must thus face the next phase, including the holidays, with this in our eyes; this will mean that the summer will not be wasted just because we cannot do the usual things, just as these months have not been wasted simply because we could not do what we did before. If we accept the challenge that the Mystery is not sparing us, it will help us to grow.

Who can say that if we had held the Paschal Triduum in Rimini together, we would have grown more than we have done by accepting the challenge we’ve faced? As Giussani says, he who avoids the struggles of life will not be able to understand certain things and will have a poor knowledge of himself. The same goes for the summer. The authorities tells us that we cannot hold gatherings; consequently, we cannot organize the summer holidays this year because it is not reasonable to put everyone at risk. But this does not mean we cannot live our reality intensely over the upcoming months. If we accept that we cannot go on holiday or on the Czestochowa pilgrimage, the Mystery can grant us great life by other means, as we have seen in the recent months. Earlier, one of you quoted the question: ““Is there something you are defending from Me because you are frightened that I could not win there?” Jesus asks us this. This is what we must verify: whether we can see Him win even with a summer that is different from the usual one, and if we can, then no circumstance of life will seem alien and there will be no circumstance in which we cannot see Him win. Thus, only by treasuring what we have seen in the last few months will we be able to face the near future with the same hope.

See you all soon, good-bye!