

**Notes from the Assembly of Teachers from Communion and Liberation in Lombardy  
with Julián Carrón  
By video conference, November 20, 2020**

**Francesco Barberis.** Good evening, everyone, and thank you, Julián, for immediately accepting our invitation. What we are experiencing—with the pandemic, schools closed, distance learning and the lack of opportunities to meet in person—is a strange time full of challenges and trials, but also of unexpected surprises. It is a great gift for us to be able to be here with you, Julián, because your presence reminds us that paternity is an action in the present, being offered to us right now. That is the source of all my gratitude.

**Francesca Zanelli.** Even now, the Mystery does not deprive us of the chance to be in relationship with Him; in fact, even more so now that He permits that we live this circumstance we would not have chosen, that we were not seeking, in which we find ourselves asking, “what could there be left to discover in the lockdown, in distance learning?” Each of us, when we have been open, have been able to recognize facts, people and relationships in our lives that were persuasive for us, which we want to look at and judge this evening with Julián’s help. We also want to help each other look at all the questions that have come to light, that the reality of the beginning of the school year has provoked in us and our students. This was the topic for tonight: “What has helped us to live our daily lives in this period, also considering the Beginning Day proposed to the whole Movement and to those in GS? What has helped us to face our students? What can awaken life in them?”

*Often, in gatherings like this one, when we adults get together to talk about our experience of GS, I struggle a bit, because, to me, it seems like the unique and original proposal of an experience like GS doesn’t shine through. I’ll try to explain: it seems to me like we often share a lot of nice facts that happened, but which could have easily happened without the experience of GS, solely on the merits of the personal journey each of us is making with regards to his or her life and vocation. Let me be clear: it’s crucial to have that journey, within the relationship with the Movement, but I have the impression that it stops there, and we don’t enter concretely into the proposal a place like GS offers. It’s good to hear about what happens in class, with one student or another, fine; but what I am discovering is that the greatest surprise is realizing again and again, within the weariness and struggle of every day, that there are certain faces who inexplicably become that flesh, that God incarnate, that Azurmendi and others spoke of. Without a place that offers me the possibility of doing this work and a companionship to face all that happens to me in life, I am lost. Without a place like this, without acknowledging and placing the truth of this place before people’s eyes—not my truth, but the truth I find in relationship with this place—I could not do what I do every day going to school and helping with GS; I would be deeply disloyal both to myself and to my students, because all I could propose would be a momentary affection or consolation. I want to ask you, therefore, if you can help me a bit to understand how we can help each other in sharing and carrying this journey of GS forward together. Thank you.*

**Julián Carrón.** Let’s leave the question open, and not because I don’t want to reply, but because it is a question that I think applies to everyone. How can we live this time together? I prefer that all of you begin to respond, seeing what emerges in our experience, so that this meeting is a sharing of experience, and not a “lesson” I give, because what he has just said seems critical to me. Who has something to say?

*In this time obviously full of struggles for us, especially for the GS students, beautiful things are happening. I see glimmers of light, in particular in those students who are even more connected to us and to each other. I could list many facts, but I also need a hand, because for me that is not what characterizes the general atmosphere: I see a lot of suffering around me, specifically I see a lot falling*

*into nihilism. It's so easy, especially when it comes to high school kids—not just in GS, but in general with my students—to shut down. There is so much isolation, which for many leads to a sometimes-dire closing in on oneself (really, it is a lack of openness) and to a great deal of suffering. I am thinking of many girls becoming anorexic, kids whose families have fallen apart or are in serious difficulties and the mourning of loved ones that plague many people I know. Looking at all this, I feel terrible, even more because the powerlessness of all of it is multiplied 100 times at a time like this. I cannot say, in total sincerity, that I feel abandoned or that I have ever felt abandoned in my life, even in the times of greatest difficulty, even when I was alone, because there has always been a relationship. And, with regards to what the first person who spoke said, I realize how truly vital it is to have a place that offers a proposal, and it seems to me that it is difficult today, not so much for me who am fortunate to be in a place like this, but for many people I know, and who are hard to reach. So, I wanted to ask for a hand.*

**Carrón.** When you speak about people you know, to whom are you referring? To your colleagues, the students, to the context of school in general? I am simply asking to better understand.

*Above all, I am thinking of a lot of students I know. Right now, they can only be reached through various communication technologies, and thanks be to God those exist, but they do not seem sufficient because all you have to do is turn off the phone for a while, not show up to a class, and then a person hurts himself. This saddens me and I don't know what to do.*

**Carrón.** Anyone else?

*Related to those facts you were asking about, I have been very struck by the part in the School of Community that says, “before I did not see, but now I do,” and on the fact that what comes between the “before” and “after” is a fact. Also, thinking about what the first person said, what is really helping me is taking the initiative with the other adults guiding GS, staying with them, telling them what is happening to me and asking what is happening in their Schools of Community with students. I wanted to give an example of what happens when are fully aware of these facts—and not only the nice ones—that change us, that change the very people we are. A boy in the GS School of Community I lead said that when he heard Azurmendi speak about the schools of the Movement in Spain—where it is clear the concern of the teachers was not to instruct, but to educate, where to educate means to love—it stung because he went to a school of the Movement, but did not feel loved. He felt like he was treated badly and left to go to a public school for his last years of high school. Shortly after listening to Azurmendi, he had to quarantine for two weeks without going to school. He wanted to see what the Movement said about education, so he decided to read *The Risk of Education*, since his father had it in the house and he had often seen many of his teachers at the school of the Movement reading the book. Basically, he was curious. He read the book and said he discovered something, “The point is, I thought that being loved meant being able to do as I please, but Fr. Giussani says that to educate is to introduce into reality. That school taught me to love knowledge, not in the sense of particular disciplines, but knowledge of reality, so what Azurmendi says is true. That makes me grateful for the school I went to, where I grew a great deal, and it's strange that it only happened a few months before I finished school. Now, I realize what it means to be loved.” I was very struck by this, because in it I saw an example of exactly what Azurmendi said, “Before I did not see, but now I do;” a fact completely changed his personal history and allowed him to look at his own history in a different way.*

**Carrón.** Does this give us the beginning of an answer?

*I would like to share two facts, one that happened in class and one during GS. Two weeks ago, I saw a video of a very sweet 81-year-old gentleman who, unable to go and visit his wife who had been sick in the hospital for a month, went and sat under his wife's window and played the accordion, serenading her for an hour. I was really struck by this and asked myself why: because it shows a person who manages to be free even within the limits of so many rules; He didn't break a single one, but was successful. Then, because of the fidelity of love, so you can clearly understand the desire to*

visit one's wife. So, I thought, "Tomorrow I will propose this to my students, who are obviously really asking that question of how to be free despite so many rules, having to stay home. I showed it in a class where there is a girl who has a negative reaction to everything I do. She watches it and at the end says, "Miss, I want to be like this!" I replied, "Perfect! That is exactly the point: what we saw is desirable." I was struck because she did the same work that I did; in other words, she used her heart to judge that video. That was the first thing. From that moment on, she began to be more open to everything, from the corrections on her homework to the things I propose. So, the question we asked for today came to mind: what generates life, also creating a culture, which is what we do at school? When we go so far, within what we are doing, as to compare with that "hot point" Pavese describes inside us, and then we offer that, we allow them to very easily compare with the "hot point" that is also inside of them. On the topic of Radius, I wanted to recount how I was left somewhat speechless, because I showed the last few minutes of the Azurmendi video. There were even three kids who know nothing about the Church or the Movement. I asked a few questions like, "Does it seem like a good idea to you, if you see something good, someone who is doing surprising things, that correspond to you, to seek it out?" I expected some resistant reactions, but they said to me, "Of course, Miss! What are you asking? Obviously, yes." In fact, all the steps we conquered again in the Radius were so simple for them. It impressed me and I thought, "Today, they have given those steps back to me." It has been really surprising for me (and this has been my experience over the last few weeks) that in doing Radius with them, it is as if I am gaining ground in my journey.

I am not sure if this answers the question about a "place" asked earlier. In recent days, my life has truly been full of facts, including very painful ones. I will try to briefly describe two of them. I have a girl in my class who had failed before and who I still haven't seen, except for 30 seconds when she turned on her webcam because I suggested we do a survey. In fact, she was connecting as a listener only and we never asked her anything. The other day during class, however, I just could not help but ask her something; it seemed absurd not to involve her, so I tried to ask her a question and she totally freaked out. So, I sent her an email, "I'm sorry that I tried to call on you, but, truly, I have this great desire to include you in this great adventure." She replied, thanking me and saying, "I cannot wait to get out of this situation." I have another student I have known for years. Recently, she spoke to me about her uneasiness at home, because she does not feel understood. So, I made an attempt, writing to her parents to thank them because she is really a splendid girl and I described a few things about her for which I am very grateful. Today, they replied to me, thanking me and saying she is also a gift for them. I, too, like our friend who spoke earlier, am seeing many sad situations, but it is less and less frequent that I tried to avoid them; it is as if it filled me with greater impulse to go out to meet these kids and their parents. This is what I am seeing. On the other hand—and this is my question—I am struck that, speaking with students in GS, it always seems like nothing is happening in their reality; it always seems flat and like they have no questions, or in the worst case, everything is burdensome, that school is terrible and there is nothing there. I am constantly wounded by reality, in the good and the bad, yet often with the GS kids, with whom there is not the same familiarity as with my students who I see for hours and hours, it seems like I have to start everything all over again from the beginning, as if the Radius went back to square one.

**Carrón.** So, how do you manage?

How do I manage... I am acting a bit like my students: first, I cannot help but bring what I live, to share what I live and what strikes me. For example, I said to a girl who lives close to me today, "I went to buy groceries, I'm practically across from your house, come on outside for a minute," and we chatted a little bit; or I try to call some of them. I try to offer what happens to me.

My students are not at all 'dead,' in fact they are very alive and today the questions poured forth, as they always do.

**Carrón.** The kids in your class or in GS? Who do you mean?

The kids in GS, but they often coincide with my students; almost all of them. I also have a question related to what happened today at Radius: how can you keep from staying at a sentimental level?

*Because often at Radius it seems so many of them talk about struggles: “I’m sad.” “I’m struggling.” How can I help them work on this? It is a problem I share, so I wanted to ask the question because often I have the same difficulty.*

**Carrón.** You see? In my opinion, this is critical, because the first difficulty is ours. In the end, therefore, we feel bad, as someone said previously, perceiving the full weight of our powerlessness. At School of Community, I said that authority is the place where the battle to affirm and verify that Christ is the answer to the needs of our heart is most clear and simple; and that battle takes place first of all in us, not in other people. Therefore, we cannot communicate anything if we do not participate in that battle; we, in fact, are not spared the drama of life. It’s not as if we, as we often think, pull answers out of a hat. It’s not automatic, and anyone who thinks they have the answers, please pull them out.

Paradoxically, then, this situation is the first gift for us, because it is overwhelming us from every direction. Who of us is not emotional seeing certain things? And who does not suffer when he feels uneasy about things? Everything we see in our students has to do first of all with us. So, if a person doesn’t verify first-hand what is truly needed to get by, it’s unlikely he will have something to offer to students. And the first thing we have to offer—regardless of the results or how long they take—is our being, as Pasolini said. “If someone has educated you, then they must have done so with their being, not with their speaking,” (P.P. Pasolini, *Lettere luterane* [Lutheran Letters], Einaudi, Turin 1976, p. 44). You do not educate with speeches, but with your being. When our being in front of them offers a response, as our friend said before. Even if the other person doesn’t understand yet, we are offering a response. Just as our friend who spoke at School of Community last Wednesday said: for years, she thought she wasn’t doing anything for her son because he kept making mistakes—like all of us: raise your hand if you don’t make mistakes! Who doesn’t fall short? Who doesn’t participate in the same drama as our students? This is why I said the real issue is us: I completely understand that if a person sees all the falling into nihilism you’ve described, the kids shutting down, it seems like all our attempts are failing. This affects us, and we cannot avoid coming to terms with it: it is impossible to start again after a really rough day as if you had not seen that nothingness and nihilism. The question is whether, between the last hour of class today—with everything that happened, with all the wounds we saw—and tomorrow morning, something happens that puts us back on track, independent of how successful or unsuccessful our attempts are. Because the real battle is not determined so much by seeing the success of what we do—that will happen when it will, it’s not in our hands—because we are engaging with the freedom of another person, not with some mechanism, as if it were something we produce: a machine or an appliance. We are in dialogue with the heart and the freedom of another person, just as God is engaging with us and with our freedom. What does it mean, then, for us to see that it seems like nothing ever happens in a lot of kids? How does this challenge us? And what does it mean, when we are successful with them, that Jesus tells us—as he told the disciples—“Do not rejoice because of that, but rather because your names are written in heaven?” Even when things are going well, it is not enough to be able to face the next day. So, in my opinion, the first useful thing to do is to recognize that we are the first people to be challenged by the situation. This is why—and here we go back to the main point—I like the words of Fr. Giussani so much, and picked them as the title for our booklet in education (J. Carrón, *Education. Communicating One’s Self*, Human Adventure Books, New York) because they have always struck me: “to educate is to communicate one’s self” (L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education. Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny*, The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York 2001, p. 110). We may manage to explain ourselves better or worse, we can propose more initiatives or fewer, but the real question is whether you wear the proposal imprinted in your face, otherwise I’m not interested, understand? Because in the book read by the young man our friend spoke about, Fr. Giussani underlines that the proposal is incarnated in the authority of an educator, “Authority is the concrete expression of the working hypothesis” (*The Risk of Education*, Montreal 2019, p. 42); otherwise, what are we talking about here? The proposal became flesh, so it is there, in the circumstances, that it has to be made present. If, as we work through the process of educating, my “I” is not generated, if I do not recognize that the Mystery doesn’t spare me the

challenges, and generates me in this circumstance, I cannot propose anything to my students. The question is whether, in a situation like the one you all have described, you can go back to teach tomorrow morning with hope imprinted in your face. But to wear it on your face, you first have to live it in your gut. You cannot put on theatrics for your students, like a talented actor, the proposal has to come forth from the depths of your being. We can put on theatrics once or twice, we can fake it and distract them, but over time it doesn't hold up. It's a good thing it doesn't hold up! It's a good thing it doesn't hold up, or we would only ever start living once class was over (in other words, after having acted the part) and not in everything we do; we would only start living, growing, being educated when our work at school was over. But, no, you have to start to live while you are in school, otherwise 99.9% of your time would be useless. Circumstances are not an obstacle to overcome to be able to start living, but are rather the road to be able to live, to learn how to live. Life is vocation; it is walking toward destiny through circumstances we do not choose, thanks be to God. If that were not the case, we could never comprehend the significance of the Christian proposal, even if we repeated the "word," our discourses or the right words unceasingly, and we'd end up nowhere. It's a good thing the "word" is not enough. I say this with sincerity: it's a good thing the "word" is not enough!

**Francesco Barberis.** There is a person whose microphone unfortunately is not working, so she wrote this, "I wanted to share that, in the face of the great inconvenience of distance learning (I teach in a professional high school), I discovered the richness of our history, because I invited my colleagues to pray the *Angelus* in the morning, and a few accepted the invitation to start the day together that way, and it is even changing the way we see each other and accompany one another. I begin classes with the desire that the students in front of me might encounter what happened to me, and I see it happening again in a few of the students who are following our friendship in a simple but incredible way. Their lives are flourishing even in this difficult time. Thanks to this, I come up with all kinds of things: group quizzes, individual classes; and I find myself full of desire and free from the results."

*I thought especially the last few things you were saying, Julián, were beautiful because they are so descriptive, from the teacher who is an actor increasingly skilled at pulling it off to the wordsmith. It really surprised me...*

**Carrón.** Especially because, in teaching that way, we end up in absolute nothingness, because if that were enough, we could be spared the trouble of living.

*Something happened to me that is really so simple it is less than insignificant, below the threshold for banality. At the last assembly for CL educators, the general assembly in which I participated—as I have in other meetings—I don't remember if it was Pigi or Francesco but they said something about you and about something else you gave witness to related to the topic of "remote" assemblies. The main point was this: Carrón doesn't even make an issue of it. The assembly ended and at some level I didn't retain anything that was said, but in the following days—many, I don't even know how many—what they said about you was "working" on me and allowed me to realize that for months the proposal of the Movement, the words we say we are working on and the times that we meet were basically a formality and I thought everything that happened in class was tied to my creativity and ability. The goad from those words intrigued me, because I realized I was totally defined by all the things I judged insufficient: analyses, evaluations, and the accurate concerns that online school is not school. So, my de facto attitude when I turned on the video and started to teach classes, some better than others, was determined by the thought that in any case we're in an unfortunate situation. What they recounted about you lifted me up and allowed me to get back in gear over the following days. And, picking up The Radiance in Your Eyes again, a lot of things I had read somewhat distractedly and mechanically instead came to life. The thing that was most uplifting for me was in the chapter about the relationship with the Father, when you comment on the passage from the Gospel cited in La convenienza umana della fede [The Human Advantageousness of Faith]. "I descended from heaven not to do My will, but the will of Him who sent Me. And the will of Him who sent Me*

is that I lose nothing of what He gave Me.’ That I lose nothing! Jesus referred to the apostles, the disciples, but the meaning can be extended. The will of the Father is that I lose nothing of what He has given me: every moment, every circumstance of life, every provocation, each thing to accomplish.” (J. Carrón, *The Radiance in Your Eyes. What Saves Us From Nothingness?*, Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, Milan 2020, p. 112). *Before, the way I started class was determined by the thought that it was all pointless, but over time those words started to turn into a new hypothesis. Nothing extraordinary happened, except that I began to notice things that happened and continue to happen that I did not see before. This is how we can build, even in circumstances like these.*

**Carrón.** So, do things happen or not?

*They happen; they happen.*

**Carrón.** Are they merely virtual?

*No, no, they really happen.*

**Carrón.** Did you participate in last Thursday’s School of Community? I haven’t met any of the people who spoke in person, but I proposed them one after the other because of the reaction I had, reading each of their contributions or listening to them on Zoom. I did not meet with Azurmendi after seeing his video (I had met him other times), and I proposed that everyone see him for Beginning Day just because of the effect he had on me. Two days before School of Community, I had had a meeting with the Families for Hospitality, and I had one of them repeat a contribution for all of you, because I could not get up the next day without having it in mind and without telling those I met about it. In the same way, I had Don Pino repeat what he had said to the Fraternity Diaconia a few weeks before. And so on, one contribution after another. I assure you, that’s exactly how it happened. I don’t care if we make mistakes—don’t misunderstand me; I am not preaching because I am priest—because the real question is whether we let ourselves be corrected as you let yourself be corrected by what is happening and the way it happens. When, 15 years ago, we started doing School of Community by video connection, there were people who maintained it could never be an adequate method. Now everyone is doing it, even those who criticized that choice. I insist, I’m not interested in the methods, because you can encounter Christianity up in a tree, next to a well, on the street, in the temple, at a banquet or who knows where. Let’s give it a rest with this reduction of Christianity to the “temple” as we imagine it! The name and form of the temple can change; the form certain gestures take, which used to be a certain way, can change. Being rigidly fixated on a certain form is not Christianity! Because from day one of the Incarnation, the temple—the form of God’s presence—no longer coincides with something, but rather Someone, with the very person of Jesus in His risen body: “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” Perhaps we know this from religion class or catechism, if we remember anything, but we only really begin to understand the nature of Christianity if it enters our gut, and then we throw away all our worries about certain established forms, and begin to appreciate the way the Mystery continues to make Christianity happen in an absolutely unexpected way. I fully understand the problem, because I was the first to have to learn it. As I have often told you, I had to walk this road because I lived in Madrid, Giussani was here in Milan and I saw him once a year, from a distance. I would have liked to have had all the communications we now have available, the web and all the texts immediately available, all of it. We have everything, but we are lacking everything, as we said on Wednesday at School of Community. The issue is a bit like Van Thuan; the point is that a Van Thuan be generated in each of us: whatever the circumstances, even if they replace the guards all the time, anyone who enters into relationship with him changes. Period; end of story. It’s anything but living in virtual reality or in the ether. We continue to make observations that, though correct, are abstract, because they do not start from facts. You, instead, as soon as you started to look at the facts that were happening, were freed from the abstract ideology you had in mind, as Azurmendi was. We all have ideologies in mind, there’s no need to be scandalized by it. Azurmendi was full of ideology, just as I was before I encountered the Movement. I have no problem, therefore, recognizing this; I’ve told you from the beginning, from the moment I arrived in Italy: what saved my life was accepting to learn what I thought I already knew. So, I don’t want to anger anyone, I am simply saying: we can make changes. I don’t care how long it takes for us to learn,

I don't want to measure up anyone here, that's not my concern. I say this for each of us: if a person is open, over time he will start to have the same experience you are having, and so reality begins to speak to you, and what was merely form for you becomes both form and substance, because there is no substance without form. Before, you had a certain form in front of you that didn't affect you, what made it affect you later? Perhaps because your way of encountering people was no longer virtual? It's virtual as it was before, but the question is whether we stay at the level of what happens when we see each other using "distance" methods. It's not as if less can happen now than if we were all there in person—otherwise we would be better off turning off the video and all going to bed—it's not true, which is why I accept this as a way of meeting together. If not, why should I waste my time and yours? Now, this does not mean that it is all the same, being in person or not. In fact, in the beginning we said that the distance caused something that was there before to explode, and this makes you suffer even more. Now, everything is amplified, and therefore it is as if the memory of Christ is even more essential; otherwise, I don't know how a person manage, how he can go back to class with hope imprinted all over his face after a day when he left wiped out and wounded. You certainly don't manage by doing a kind of mental gymnastics.

*I am very grateful for this year and these circumstances, because they have been an opportunity for me to verify what you said at the Meeting: that a person can come into class full of fear or of hope. For the first hour of class this year, the principal connected with all the students and, in a video message, started off saying just that: "We are beginning again, and what is it that characterizes all of us? Fear about what is about to begin." This year, I am verifying that I have nothing else available to me with the students except class time, because we have been doing online classes from the beginning...*

**Carrón.** This is the only way to be a realist.

*From the beginning, we started with distance learning for half of the students, so many of the kids who are new in class I have only seen every once in a while. In previous years, the most beautiful moments always happened during breaks by the coffee-maker, little conversations, but this year all we have is class time.*

**Carrón.** Wonderful! Long live freedom, my friends! Finally! You cannot get by just duplicating all you did before.

*What has struck me is that, for some time now, you have kept telling us that the real issue is looking and having the openness to follow the lead of what we see. With just class time to work with, the only chance I have to go to meet them is in class, and things are coming out of class now...*

**Carrón.** If nothing happens during class, why should they be interested in getting together afterward? *One girl is part of a Catholic family who can't stand people in the Movement. During one conference, the mother, who is very worried about a kind of crisis her daughter is going through, said to me, "Couldn't you meet with her? Couldn't you speak with her?" The girl sent me an email saying, "I am struck by what you say during class; it is provoking a lot of questions in me, and I would like to talk about them. Could we talk?" I am struck how we are distant, connected only virtually, but that takes away nothing of the possibility for encounter.*

**Carrón.** Thank you for that. It's not as if you're the only ones in this situation. In fact, when I went to teach in a diocesan school in Madrid and then in the seminary—not in a public school or in a particularly complicated situation—I could do nothing, no activities, outside of class; I had all eyes turned on because I was in CL. But I felt it was my big chance to overcome dualism, because if everything could not be transmitted through class time, whatever I added later would be like a hat stuck on my head externally. This doesn't mean that, if you can do something, you shouldn't, pay attention! I'm not saying we shouldn't do anything outside of class time. I'm just saying that it's there, in class, that you encounter everyone, even the ones you could never have encountered out of class in your extracurricular initiatives. Like that girl, for example: she wouldn't have come to you if you didn't have her in class. And precisely because she did not choose it, she finds you in front of her and has to come to terms with your presence, which she cannot explain away with her anti-CL

ideology; and so, you could make a contribution without forcing her freedom or that of her mother. This means you cannot do anything in a sterile, “sanitized” way, without presenting your person. A “neutral” teacher does not exist except in someone’s imagination. You present yourself as a living “I,” everything else is abstraction. In explaining any subject (I don’t know what you teach), you communicate a certain gaze. This is what we are studying in School of Community: the new intelligence is a gaze, an outlook. Now, your teaching documents whether your gaze is generated by an event that happened to you, or by your own analysis according to certain principles, meaning by an abstract universal and not by an event. What changed Azurmendi was a radio show. Nothing else would have happened, he would never have become interested in the Movement, if it wasn’t for that first impact. If, instead of continuing to listen to that thing that struck him on the radio, if he had changed stations, everything would have ended there! He never would have met Javier, Macario and all the others; none of the things he described in the video and in his book would have happened. Just like if John and Andrew had not been there that afternoon. Or if the man born blind had not been at the street corner that morning. This is it! It’s God’s method, which astonishes us. Think, if you had not looked at that girl and her mother the way you looked at them. Or imagine someone who performs a Baptism like a functionary instead of having an encounter. There is no difference: one man goes to work, another performs a Baptism, another gives a sermon, another is the doorman and another a prisoner like Van Thuan. There is no difference. And this leads us back to the heart of things. This is Christianity: running into a difference that can be even be communicated through Zoom. And it’s not as if without Zoom the difference would be communicated all the same: nothing would be communicated; nothingness is all we’d pass on. I’m not saying this to scold anyone, but to free us all. Recognizing this is to be freed from all the boxes and schemes that would discourage us. If in the morning a person thinks, “Right now, I can’t do anything; it’s impossible in this situation,” he is defeated before even showing his face on Zoom; he is defeated before he starts, stuck in his head. And he wears that imprinted in his face. What, then, can this situation offer us to help us grow? Let’s stop complaining! The Mystery could have found another way, avoiding the virus. But He didn’t spare us. This is what is most evident, as Fr. Giussani said: inevitable circumstances are the most obvious ones—so complaining is pointless—we did not choose them; and I am sure no one would have chosen remote means to do his own work, or to encounter the students.

*I would like to share something very simple that helped me to better understand what it means to say education is communicating one’s self. I teach classes online; I open Google Classroom and see that six out of 25 students have turned in their homework, pretty disappointing. I had already said good-bye to the students, but seeing that fact I said, “Guys, I understand that right now you may prefer to do anything but this, to have music lessons in person, to be able to go to school. I, too, would like to do anything but this, I really like riding my bike to school.” I also saw that their faces were all a bit “moody,” as if they were all a bit depressed, so I went on, “But we are greater than the mood we wake up in.”*

**Carrón.** Perfect!

*And I added, “Sometimes, however, in order to see this fact, that we are greater, we simply need to accept reality as it is, including online music lessons or physics homework.” They looked at me, maybe they were even happy enough that I was saying it, but I realized that they didn’t fully grasp the point. So, at a certain point I said, “Guys, look: I am not saying this because I want you to do my physics assignments, no one’s going to die over that, you will live just the same. I’m saying this because reality has never betrayed me.” As soon as I said those words, I saw their faces change. They thanked me and we had class. I thought to myself, “After this, next time they’ll do their homework,” but I stopped myself and thought, “What does it matter to me? They may not do the homework, but something happened.” In saying, “Reality has never betrayed me,” every time that I stuck to reality at face value, I discovered something about myself that made me enthusiastic; I discovered great things. It was that witness that touched their hearts, the “hot point” and changed their gaze. As this was happening, I started to understand the question of the witness and communication of one’s self.*

**Carrón.** I would ask you, “Can this remain at just a sentimental level?”

No.

**Carrón.** Perfect!

*I realized it was not a sentimental thing; there was nothing sentimental about that moment and it did not generate any kind of sentimental reaction in the kids.*

**Carrón.** Rather, it changed their faces.

*It changed their faces. And even if, next time, not all of them have done the homework, I realized how this communication of oneself is education, and is paradoxically the possibility that, slowly, they all start to do their homework.*

**Carrón.** Perfect.

*Often, however, it as if I thought the opposite was true: they don't do their homework, so... But this time I said to myself, "It's not like that, so what is it that comes first? Why don't they do the work?" Even when they are a thousand miles away, you perceive you are all united. I realize that, instead, when I give an assignment with that "so..." behind it, for them it is something distant and unrelated. So I said to myself, "If I never engage with you at this level, how can I hope to have you do the homework? Clearly, it's my job; I want them to do their homework and to discover the beauty that I have discovered, but I really came to see that, even if they don't do their homework, that fact still happened and it will be for them just as it has been for me: it will have to happen who knows how many thousand times for it to change me morally, I don't know how to say it.*

**Carrón.** For it to morally change you. The Mystery planted a seed in them, and we have to wait and see how much time it will take for that seed to blossom. But you—first of all—discovered that they were not reduced to the level of sentimentality, and when they are reduced to sentimentality, it is because they have not found a person who touches on the innermost fibers of their being. It is not the student's fault, and perhaps not even ours; it will happen when it will. This is the question: why did you say what you said, convinced you would reach the "hot point" in them? Because it was true for you, and therefore you said it to them with conviction, independently of what they might have done, because it was true regardless of how they received it. This freed you from the results, from the fact that they may do the homework or not, because what you saw in their faces is beyond what you are able to measure the next day. Why? Because it is not a measure that makes a difference, but rather an event that, then, takes all the time necessary. It is a beginning that encompasses the entire trajectory of certainty, as the School of Community reading says. And if it happened that way for the apostles, since the Gospel is continually saying, "And they believed in Him," "And they believed in Him," "And they believed in Him," think how many times it will have to happen before it takes shape in them, just as it did in you? To keep from getting discouraged, all it takes is awareness of yourself, and then you always look at them with the same gaze someone else used to look at you when you didn't manage something, when you went to complain because you couldn't do it and the other person looked at you, again, like you looked at them. Everything already happened in that initial change, when we pronounced that famous, "Eureka!" A new intelligence was born because something happened, you see it in a person's face. And if you don't see it in their face, it didn't happen. "Do you understand?" I asked my students after one class. "Yes," they replied. And I said, "No, you didn't understand; from your faces I can see you didn't understand." You have to see in a person's face if he or she understood, as you could see in your students. And then, you shouldn't go on to measure every time that you don't see it; let's not go back to the everyday routine, complaining!

The most important work, therefore, is this interplay in responding to reality because, as you said, reality never betrays us. Reality constantly introduces this work to us, no matter what that reality is. Before, you used a word: engage. A presence who is engaged with what he or she says, that is how Fr. Giussani spoke about authority; not a person who is aloof and speaks from on high, but a person engaged with what he is saying. This is a wonderful opportunity, my friends! I didn't finish telling you about my experience teaching in the seminary in Madrid: they could forbid me to speak to my students even one millimeter outside my classroom, but they couldn't keep anyone from talking about class the next day in the lunch room, because there the rules didn't apply! There is no situation in which this is impossible. I am not saying this for other people's sake, but for us, so we do not get

discouraged before even starting class. You looked at your students saying to each of them, “You are greater than the mood you are in.” That is the conviction of a person who is aware of herself, who does not reduce herself to her moods. That is not a small thing.

Thank you. All my best as you continue your work.

**Barberis.** My warmest regards to all of you. Let’s close with a prayer, entrusting to Our Lady all the richness of life and the paternity we have experienced, yet again.

*Memorare*