

HUNGER FOR MEANING
Notes from the GS End of the School Year
with Julián Carrón and Francesco Barberis

By video conference,
June 2, 2021

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Songs: *Martino e l'imperatore* ["Martino and the Emperor"] (Claudio Chieffo)
Vieraju ["The Creed"] (sung by the choir)

Francesco Barberis. Hello everyone! We are here in Milan with Fr. Carrón, whom I thank for many things, especially for something I will tell you about in a moment. Other friends are here, together with myself and Fr. Julián, for this assembly as part of this GS day marking the end of the school year, with the theme, "Despite everything, we are hungry to find meaning in life." There are over two hundred groups connected, with more than three thousand participants, and we received over one hundred contributions from all of you. I have read them all—I am proud of them!—and I thank each one of you for what you have written and witnessed.

The verification of this time is whether we have grown, whether or not the struggles have been an obstacle to the growth of our gaze and of our reason, as one of you wrote, "Something happened to me, amidst the seemingly monotonous rhythms of life that sometimes make everyday life seem arid, and it was something that struck me, that attracted me in a way: my heart could not hold back in the face of the small fuse that was lit inside of me." Another friend observed, "I began to look at myself, but not in order to compare myself to others or to get attention. I began to discover myself in action, and to discover a number of questions that have been in my heart for a while." Yet another wrote, after hearing our friend Alfonso Calavia's witness during the Easter Triduum, that he wants to "live Christianity as a love story." And, lastly, another young woman wrote, "I am convinced that every action, every situation, even the most terrible, has a bit of good in it. Without these months, I probably would never have noticed the beauty of the little things."

One of the affirmations from Fr. Giussani that really left its mark as we listened to Fr. Andrea's meditations for the Triduum was this: "The solution to the problems life poses to us every day 'does not come from addressing the problems directly, but from exploring more deeply the nature of the individual who faces them,'" (L. Giussani quoted in A. Savorana, *Life of Luigi Giussani*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal 2017, p. 491). Certain affirmations enter our souls and challenge us when we are surprised to find them confirmed in our daily lives. That is why, Julián, I want to thank you in a special way, because the companionship you offer to me and to us is at this level. I, who am a poor wretch, can return at any moment to living with that same humanity and reasonableness that you constantly witness to me. Every circumstance, then, becomes an opportunity to take a step, to discover something about myself, and not only for me, but also in service of the whole world, for every person we meet.

Contribution. *What I have learned in recent months, especially after the three days of the Triduum, is that life is a battle, not against Covid or distance learning, which are circumstances, but against nothingness. By "nothingness," I mean that which gives us a feeling of emptiness. It's that ugly, sad feeling that I had constantly in the midst of the pandemic, that left me uncomfortable. After the Triduum, I didn't want to live that nothingness anymore; today, I don't want to live that nothingness anymore. As Alfonso Calavia said during his witness, "Our need fights against nothingness." It actually took me a while to understand that sentence. If I understand correctly now, it means that we are the ones, with our needs and our desires, who have to respond to nothingness and mount a counterattack against the thoughts: "Just live life passively, just settle, just pretend that everything is okay!" I want to go to bed happy. I want to live every day with my heart full. We are made to be*

happy and, as I discovered at the Triduum, in order to be happy, we have to compare what is in front of us with the needs of our heart. I have to ask myself whether something is for me or not. I have to understand what my heart wants, what it seeks, and what it needs. What I have been discovering is that the thing my heart longs for is a presence. I discovered this thanks to meetings I went to with my friends. What I am trying to do these days, then, is to discover in every person that presence for which my heart longs.

Contribution. *A few weeks ago, at our group meeting, we read the second sheet from the Triduum, the one that, among other things, spoke of Judas. The text said that he, who also lived with Jesus and whose eyes were full of exceptional facts, was always in a state of “waiting for” something. To him, it seemed like the point of resolution that could definitively overcome all his limitations and problems never came. I feel like I am always in the same situation: although I also have eyes full of exceptional facts—truly exceptional!—which seem to point to a very clear path in response to all the questions that arise, a certain sadness remains and, in fact, in some cases seems to be grow greater and deeper. So, I wanted to ask: is it possible for the sadness that, at least from what I seem to discover, lingers, not to be an objection to what you have encountered?*

Julián Carrón. Hello everyone! I am always happy to meet with you because, with your bluntness and your loyalty to yourselves, you always bring to the table the urgency you bear inside as young people. These months have truly been for all of us—and so also for all of you—a unique provocation, perhaps the greatest one we have faced in our lives. Now it seems like it’s all blowing over, but let us all remember that understanding the meaning of what was happening—as we were in the midst of it—was not automatic. The question, then, is whether this circumstance, with the feeling of emptiness that it sometimes filled her with, allowed our friend who first spoke to discover something. The point is whether this provocation from reality helped us to discover something, if the emptiness a person finds inside or—as the person who just spoke said—the sadness he perceives helps him to discover something about himself. Every provocation from reality is an opportunity to understand ever more deeply who we are. Often, we think we have to figure that out who knows where, or through some strange rite of passage. No, my friends, we can only discover who we are by living. Could I have imagined having a heart so great that I experienced that emptiness, even by reading about characters or poets who spoke about it? It is only when we experience having this heart that we can recognize the immensity and abyss of that emptiness and sadness. We are amazed to realize we are immeasurable. And what does that say about us? It documents the greatness in us, and that we are not content with just anything.

Still, you might think, “Feeling this sense of emptiness, this sadness or disproportion is a raw deal!” I disagree: go figure if the One who makes us, who has created so many sparrows, could not create other beings who were content with what they are, or other asters who could fly about perfectly without feeling any lack, or other fish and dogs! He, however, wanted to create beings who could participate in a fullness that dogs do not even dream of. Perceiving all the drama of humanity *is* the sign—as a genius like Leopardi tells us—of our greatness. If a person is loyal with his experience, he cannot fail to recognize this. A dog does not miss anything, but I ask you, “When you fall in love, would you prefer to miss her or him? Or would you prefer to be a rock, so you wouldn’t miss them?” Rocks don’t miss anything, but they also don’t enjoy anything! It’s a good thing life occasionally doesn’t go as we think it should, because then it would be flat, reduced to something to survive!

Now, we can at least begin to glimpse how all that life brings to light in us—the sense of emptiness, the sadness—tells us how great our hearts are, how we are made for a fullness that is beyond all imagination.

This, first of all, makes it possible for us not to give up on the greatness of our hearts, because we are made for something great, for an increasingly baffling fullness. Secondly, it prevents us from being fooled by anyone into settling for thinking that just anything will do. The Mystery has thrown us into the fray of life with a detector to identify, as our friend said, the people we can see are living

this greatness. Finding people like that makes us certain that what we are waiting for exists, and that the emptiness we sometimes feel, the sadness we experience is, as St. Thomas says, “desire for a good [still] absent,” but real. So, your sadness, my friend, is not an objection; it’s what keeps us from settling.

I am amazed how this nature we have, despite all the tricks we pull, all our attempts to run away, to hide it or to distract ourselves, never releases its hold on us; and from within us it pushes us to seek that for which we are made. The adventure of life is in this search. What, then, makes the difference? To be able to identify the presences our friend spoke of, we need to be attentive. The more life challenges and provokes us, the easier it is to identify the people who radiate that fullness we desire for ourselves. We have inside of us the detector to recognize them: that sadness is the sign of the desire for a good that we have still not found.

Therefore, only those who are willing to participate in life’s adventure will be able to discover, according to an unknown design, people in whom they see what they desire happening.

Barberis. I realized that, as you were just saying, our nature never gives up its hold on us. Reading the students’ contributions, I saw how many of them chose to follow this nature, without being intimidated, and doing so recognized that they have grown, that their awareness has matured.

Contribution. *How often has it happened that we are doing well and are at the peak of what could be called “normal” life, but still feel something is missing? What is this lack? What causes it? How can it be filled? I often found myself asking these questions, wondering why I wasn’t really satisfied, why I was overwhelmed by fears and insecurities. When I was doing well, it took very little to change my mood: a simple unexpected circumstance or question left unanswered that tormented me like a worm. What helped me to find myself again, to understand myself and to put myself into play with greater awareness in the face of difficulties, was a dialogue. Finding people with an infinite humanity who asked themselves the same questions, or had already found answers, pushed me to open up, to put myself out there, and to share myself as they shared themselves. For all this, I cannot help but thank the GS group, whom I met this year, and who became the first point of reference and place to begin again in deepening my humanity. This would not have been possible if it had not been for my teacher, who on a monotonous day like many others asked me to attend a meeting. That hour with the group was enough for me to understand that I couldn’t find anything else that would correspond so much, and that I could not go on without that fantastic companionship. If you can define “home” as a place you go back to because you were yourself there, then I can only define GS that way. Thanks to the group, and especially thanks to my teacher, I learned to look at my fears as friends, and to discover them rather than hide them, because even fears give rise to questions about our humanity and set us in motion to discover ourselves. Often, on special occasions such as our birthday, before blowing out the candles we are told, “Make a wish,” but once it’s done, we forget, because we consider it just a wish. We do not see that desire is actually the first engine that moves each of us. When we perceive our desire, we look for a way to satisfy our hunger for life, and this urges us to open ourselves to dialogue, to otherness, to the fruitfulness of life. Desire is like blowing out our candles, but keeping the flame burning inside us.*

Contribution. *Two weeks ago, a tragic incident shook me and my entire class: a classmate of mine, a friend of mine, though maybe not the closest, took his own life. The past few weeks, especially the first few days, were full of pain, as if a spear had pierced me and all my friends; it was an unimaginable thing, humanly heartbreaking. Indeed, in pain, we are all brothers and sisters, radically defenseless, helpless and frightened. Faced with such a serious event, there was; however, a great unity and authenticity in the relationships with all my classmates, friends and teachers, one that I had never experienced before, though it has always been desirable. It is true that, when we are faced with something serious and painful, we are immediately awakened from our daily torpor and called to be sincere with ourselves and with anyone who is around us. Above all, together with this*

great pain, I have been able to experience a great closeness with and consequently a boundless gratitude for the companionship of friends who have been given to me, and for the gift of faith, which allows me to say with certainty that our classmate, and all of us, will not find our end in nothingness, but rather in Him. The companionship that supported me these days was expressed in many forms: text messages, voicemails, calls, visits and priceless prayers, which I ask of all of you, too. I truly want everyone to be able to find a friendship like this, the only path to being able to get through every suffering without wanting to erase it, which is precisely the strongest temptation that I feel even now, given that a little time has passed and the impact has obviously faded. A few days ago, thinking back to what happened, I realized that this dramatic fact reminds me and reminds us to be aware that our humanity is made up of an irrepressible cry for happiness that, if it becomes begging and not closing in on oneself (an attitude that—I realize—we have to confront every day), can truly become that crack through which good, beauty, light and love can enter. For me, every day has been and still is like this. I am amazed above all by two things. The first is that this tragedy has fallen right in the middle of the path of this year, focused on suffering due to various things that have led me to discover innumerable people who witnessed and are still witnessing today how it is possible to truly live every circumstance, even pain and suffering. Truly, nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, and in all these things we are victorious thanks to the One who loved us, as St. Paul said. The second thing is that I realize how what I said—this is quite clear to me—is not a result of me being talented, but of something that is given to me, something I want to grab ahold of more firmly in my life, even, and especially, within my thickheadedness and fragility. Finally, I would like this radicality in facing the things that have arisen because of such an ugly event—that I still do not understand and I hope never happens to anyone again—can be even more present in my life; I would like to be helped to live this begging for truth and for reality every day, and I would like each person, especially those feeling desperate or drowning in the abyss of suffering, might experience this total embrace of love.

Contribution. *I would like to share two recent facts. The first is related to school. Since the beginning of this year, I've been wondering why I chose this, of all the schools, and what it had that made me choose it. In four years, I still hadn't made sense of it, and this year I worked a lot, starting from the time a teacher told my parents at a conference, "Your daughter is talented, she is attentive and fully present in class; she could even be considered the best student in the class, but she lacks a passion for what she is doing. She needs to put something of herself in the things she does at school." You see, what I was missing was that passion that allows you to enjoy things fully. So I started, one step at a time. It was not easy, and I do not deny that sometimes I really forced myself to study, just as Carrón said at the meeting with seniors: to become passionate about studying, the only thing you can do is to study. And so it is, really that is the only way. I tried, and I found something: now I have started to relish doing things, and I get satisfaction out of understanding things in Latin, out of seeing why they wrote in a certain way in Greek, and I really like reading about history. The second fact happened recently. For a long time now, even at the Triduum, we have been talking about a young man with ALS. A dear friend of mine invited me to visit him, and so we went with a small group of people. After waiting a bit on the terrace—which is beautiful!—we went in and a motionless figure lying in bed with eyes full of wonder appeared in front of me. The first thing he said was, "What are you doing here? Why here, of all places?" Eh, what were we doing there? That's what we talked about. Then there was a moment of silence, and one by one, he looked us in the eye, with a piercing look, the kind from a person who, when they speak to you, look right inside of you, penetrating the depths. Then, he asked us about ourselves. The way he spoke to us seemed, in spite of everything, so incredibly normal. Once we left, I went to the balcony and the only thing I could do was burst into tears; I tried to hold back, but then I couldn't anymore. I felt like I had been hurled against a wall, like a Lego set that, when thrown into the wall, breaks apart to reveal all the pieces that make up the whole. I found myself in the position of saying, "And now what the heck do I do? Now that I have seen a person who can live like this, despite not being able to do anything, what do I do?" As if, until then, I was like one of those dormant volcanoes, which are silent; they show no signs of activity,*

though they are not yet extinguished. It forced me to look at the way I really need to face reality, without getting stuck and not going past my own action. But how do I do that? I find it so difficult to say, as that person said, "I entrust myself completely; I abandon myself completely." He said, "I am an instrument in His hands," so it was not him who attracted people, but rather that Him who showed Himself to me through that young man. But what can I do? How can I gain the certainty that there are no exceptions or objections? I see things happening; I see them and am amazed. I see that person with ALS and it is clear something is behind the way he his, but then, when it comes to me, everything falls apart because I no longer know how to move. What should I do now that all this has been placed in front of me?

Carrón. Earlier, Francesco said, "Recognize that you are growing." We can see when something that happens to us in life is truly useful when we see we have grown in our awareness of ourselves. Like when you study: how can you see if you have learned anything? If, when you take your exam, you can explain the reasons for your argument; if, after having studied, your knowledge has not increased, you are right back at the beginning. We see this every day: it's not enough to be in class, warming the seat as if you were a rock, and it's not enough to go through the pandemic passively. We have to become aware of what we are learning, from school and from the pandemic. We all take a test on what we've learned through the provocations life brings. Recently, I've been thinking a lot about the fact that, precisely now that we begin to go back to so called "normal life," we are all put to the test to see how we have lived this time of the pandemic.

I recently read an article by a Spanish journalist who lives in the heart of Madrid. From the window of her house, she can see life, the city's nightlife, exploding again. For months, everyone was waiting to be able to go back, to be able to start living again, to be able meet up with and spend time with friends. But this journalist didn't just notice that; she could have been satisfied to say we are finally back to normal. Instead, she wondered: of all the people out and about in the city all night, "How many went to bed happy that morning, as the sun came up?" (R. Montero, "*Hoy, aquí, ahora* [Today, here, now]," *El País*, May 23, 2021). With this question, everyone has to take the test for themselves—in fact they are already doing so—because as we go back to living what we've been waiting for all these months, (going back to normal), you see whether you have grown, whether you have "recognized that you have grown" in some way in life. Each of us has been challenged these months, as we said before, and maybe we have all thought, "Finally I understand! And when things go back to normal, I will be able to face life with more awareness, not wasting time, but focusing on what is fundamental in life, and now I know what relieves my fear." This journalist wrote the same thing; she is no stranger to life. She speaks about friends who have been diagnosed with cancer who, "swear to her that the disease has opened their eyes and that, if they overcome it, they will never again waste their time worrying about nonsense, nor will they stop appreciating the truly valuable things in life." It amazes me, because it seems like she is describing a situation that we, too, find ourselves living. In certain moments, it is as if our gaze were opened wide, and we finally see life clearly, in all its drama, in all its mystery and in all its force of provocation; and we think the open gaze that we experienced at that moment became ours. But this journalist challenges us, writing that those friends, once healed, forget what they discovered during the illness and "fall back [...] into the same confusion about who they are and what they want" (R. Montero, "*Hoy, aquí, ahora*," *El País*, May 23, 2021). Why? Because, yes, their gaze opened up, but the new gaze did not become theirs; they did not assimilate it enough for it to remain when the time came to go back to normal.

This is, in my opinion, the greatest help we need to offer one another in order not to lose not only what others may have told us, but, above all, what we have seen with our own eyes. Life has provoked us. It has opened our eyes wide, and we have seen things more clearly, without the usual obtuseness, without the fog that sometimes prevents us from seeing distinctly. We have seen with our own eyes. But it is as if, after a while, the fog descends again and we go back to how we were before, without having learned anything. That's why I'm always struck by Eliot's words, "Where is the Life we have lost in living?" (T.S. Eliot, *Choruses from "The Rock*," Harcourt, New York 1934, p. 7). To lose one's

life in living, which means instead of maturing to be more and more equipped for life, it is often as if of all that we live—and that was given to us precisely so we could grow, to learn to live, to understand our lives more and more, to understand how to study better, how to relish studying, how to face difficulties head-on—nothing remains.

I think that we have a spectacular opportunity in front of us right now: throughout the pandemic, the challenge was how to live in the face of the emptiness we talked about before, or in the face of solitude, or not being able to see friends or be in class together with your classmates. Now, however, the challenge has not ended, not for the revelers of Madrid's night life, and not for any of us, who all have to go back to "normal" and on the first weekend that's a little freer, we will be up against the tragedy of the Mottarone cable car crash, a friend who has ALS or the suicide of a classmate. It is in facing these circumstances in life that we can understand whether we have had that experience of growth, if we have grown. It is not enough to have made it through the pandemic; it is not enough to show up in class to learn something; it is not enough to attend certain gestures to ensure that something will stick with you and enrich your life, without having to start over from the beginning, as if we had learned nothing. For life to be life, which is an adventure, we have to equip ourselves for it. That preparation is critical if we want to fully enjoy our studies and relationships, to understand the importance of your friends, to discover the answers to the most urgent questions inside us and to face all the challenges ahead of us head-on.

In light of that, we all have "homework" now. What's the homework? Yours, mine, and that of the Spanish journalist, of the young people who make up the Madrid nightlife, what is it? To verify what we have learned during "lockdown," during the pandemic. Whether we learned anything, or whether we have already forgotten it all. Even realizing that we have forgotten something is part of verifying, because then we can go back and relearn it, we can be such loyal friends that we do not let anything we have intuited fall through the cracks, including that new gaze on life we perceived as desirable for ourselves. There is a fascinating adventure that awaits us: to verify how we have grown. It would be a real shame if all the struggle of these months slipped away into nothingness, if we failed to grow, not having grasped the meaning of everything we have experienced.

So then, let's help each other now by sharing the new self-awareness that we have gained, the awareness of having matured. I think this is the greatest gesture of friendship we can offer one another so that we do not forget what we have experienced. We were lucky enough to find a great friend—Fr. Giussani—who lived with such an awareness that he did not let the things that happened to him slip away, and because of this, he helps us to live. What is it we remember? What has enriched our life forever? Anyone can see the answer when, faced with certain new situations, he remembers facts that were deposited there, in the drawer of his memory, and he faces the circumstances precisely in the light of those facts. So, what do we remember? We don't remember everything; we forget so many things! We only remember the things we judge, because by judging them we were able to truly recognize how we have grown.

We have all lived through this time. We have all learned something (some more, some less; depending on the seriousness with which we have lived). We have all seen something, and our gaze has been opened up in some way, but the fact that big or little things—as you have been saying—have happened is not the reason we have grown. Things happen to a dog too, but it is not able to judge. We too can live like dogs, that is, without the awareness of being men and women, without noticing things. Not out of malice, but out of a lack of seriousness with ourselves. In doing so, we waste opportunities to grow. So, I think that now, at the end of the school year, with more free time, less stress, when you are able to relax, we can give ourselves this homework for the summer: while we are at the beach, in the mountains, on a walk or on vacation, when some thought of something we have learned comes to mind, let's take note. It will be like filling the archive of our memory with a wealth of experience. Take, for example, this line from Fr. Giussani that Fr. Andrea quoted during the Triduum, which Francesco mentioned earlier, "The solution to the problems life poses to us every day 'does not come from addressing the problems directly, but from exploring more deeply the nature of the individual who faces them.'" Giussani could say these things because, having lived like this,

at a certain point he saw he had learned. And we can enjoy what he has learned, we can face our circumstances armed with the wealth accumulated by a person who was aware of things. In the same way, you can also help one another: when you fall in love, you will be able to help your boyfriend or girlfriend to understand what it means to live, and in the future, you can become fathers or mothers without having to start all over again. You will only be able to offer the meaning of life to your children if you do not waste time now; which is to say, if everything that happens in life helps you to grow. Otherwise, we will go back to so-called “normal,” living just as before, having missed the opportunity.

Barberis. I don't think anyone wants to lose life in living; no one wants to lose what he has seen (as you were saying before) with his own eyes or to go back into the fog that blurs everything. I think about this a lot, and not just for my students, but for myself, for my family and for the adults I meet. No one wants to lose their life, and yet it happens.

Carrón. Of course.

Barberis. Why does it not happen to you? You just used the verb “to judge,” to retain what has happened. I said it already at the beginning: this is one of the things that strikes me the most, that helps me to really live daily life. I'd like to ask you to spend a little more time talking about that, because it seems like a crucial point, but also one we take for granted and most easily lose track of.

Carrón. This was one of the things that most fascinated me when I met Fr. Giussani, a grace that I experienced through him. I was fascinated by it because, before I met him, what happened to you happened to me: I had my humanity as you have yours, I had my sorrows as you have yours, I had my questions as you have yours, and things happened to me, as they happen to you too, but I never realized that I had a tool right in my grasp. I recognized it through the encounter with Fr. Giussani: I had the ability to judge. To experience is not just to feel something, it is not enough to have something happen in life to be able to say we've had a true experience. In fact, we can try hundreds of things, but how many of them do we learn from; how many make us grow? This discovery turned my world upside down, and that's why I always told Fr. Giussani, “I will thank you my whole life long, because since I met you, you have helped me to make a human journey, full of awareness.” I was enthusiastic about this! When a person wants to walk, to study or do laboratory research, the important thing is learning the method. It's not enough to have moments of genius, you need to learn a method so that everything that happens—good or bad, it doesn't matter—teaches me something. As a friend of mine says, “An experiment is still an experiment,” even when it does not go according to your predictions, you still learn something. When you go to buy shoes, you try them on and you can say, “No, that's not the right size.” You are always growing, not just when you get the right answer, but also when you're wrong. You imagine being able to live with the constant concern that nothing in life be lost; but if it is not judged, it is lost. This is why I was enthusiastic, and since I met Fr. Giussani, I have wanted nothing more than for this method, which he describes in the first chapter of *The Religious Sense*—not in his 38,000th volume, no, in the first chapter of *The Religious Sense!*—to become mine. And over time, I've become more and more enthusiastic about it. If I could do it, so can you, if you want to: you can learn a method that allows you to learn from everything. It's not that you have to be good, and you can't mess up or get mixed up sometimes, because you can always learn from whatever situation you come across. That's why I'm so keen to tell you: I'm not here to solve some particular problem that you have, but rather to show you a useful method to help you learn from whatever situation you find yourself in: a pandemic, emptiness, sadness, melancholy, evil, mistakes, everything, everything, everything! So, we don't need to censor anything, which is like saying that we don't want to waste anything. Got it?

Contribution. *These last days at school have turned out to be a bit of a struggle. I often find myself feeling very tired and sad, because it sometimes seems to me like the first impact with reality generates a wound, in contrast to the great desire and expectations I have. There are some days in which the whole weight of contradiction and my powerlessness comes out, and seeing myself exhausted this way*

scandalizes me. I would like to always be truly present, for things to be clear and simple, and I would like to live that true fullness and obedience that I have recognized in every moment. In all this, the absurd thing I realize is that this restlessness in me scandalizes me, but not my friends, who force me to look at everything that comes to light in me, without leaving anything out. They love my heart even more than I do, guarding what I bear inside as precious. I am thinking of two incidents in the last week—but I could cite many others—which made me realize how I am looked at and loved because I am, for no other reason. The first was a conversation I had with two friends on Thursday afternoon. It was short, but profoundly true, because what came out was how the real greatness of life is in a journey, in constantly recovering the highest and truest things and in always recognizing our need. More than anything, what was great was not what we said to each other, though the words have accompanied me, but the fact that these friends are there for me, that I can ask them when I don't understand, and that they are friends to me in a way that cannot help but foster gratitude, and call me back to live and focus on the things that are asked of me. The second incident took place on Saturday afternoon. We had choir practice, and I had not gone for two weeks because of quarantine, and it was beautiful because I really felt myself embraced in such a warm way by my friends there, for merely the fact that I was there. I see that all this good I receive, which was evident in that moment, frees me, because I can simply follow and put myself back on the road, even with all my struggles and objections. It seems like, in the moments when I am most troubled and do not understand, there is a tenderness and care for me, because I am placed in front of undeniable signs of a friendship that overwhelms me with its overabundance. As a dear friend said to me, "the method becomes the companionship." I am not the one who asserts myself to follow or be present, though I often do this because I want to handle things on my own, but it is a being guided and accompanied at every step. These friends, with their presence, point out a road to me: "Follow me, I will lead you," as Jesus says to the disciples. I live keeping the faces of my dearest friends in mind, and for me, recognizing that again is the most wonderful thing: constantly rediscovering that you are not alone, that there is a companionship that never goes away, and that I am the object of a love that never asks anything in exchange, but merely waits for me to give in to the great correspondence I feel. I am rediscovering a dimension of communion and daughterhood which make me truly feel embraced, and thanks to this good I receive, I see I am ultimately serene, as if what is beneath everything deep down is trust. In the face of the studying that awaits us, graduation exams, choosing a university, and the challenges being asked of a few friends, the only reason I am not afraid is because I am continually being taken by the hand, because I depend on this love, and in it, I can ask for everything.

Carrón. You see? What you are saying documents the fact you are already walking the road: in one sense, the first impact with reality often provokes a wound in us, you perceive a contradiction and feel all your powerlessness—welcome to the club of human beings!—and the restlessness you feel scandalizes you. "It is a scandal for me," you said. It is as if you didn't know what place, what role this chasm inside us has in your life. And since we don't understand it, we think the best solution is to get rid of it. But seeing as we cannot get rid of it, and this baffles us, we are scandalized. At a certain point, something new appears: you find yourself in front of friends who look at your humanity without being scandalized, and this allows you to look at yourself without scandal. It's the same thing that happened to me, too: I saw the audacity with which Fr. Giussani looked at or spoke about things that scandalized me, and that allowed me to look at things I had not been able to look at, like you. I was amazed by the great witness Giussani offered in St. Peter's Square, before the Pope and the Church, in 1998 (it's published in the beginning of *Generating Traces in the History of the World*). He began his remarks speaking about the gaze he came across in his life, Jesus's gaze: "No woman ever heard another voice speak of her son with such an original tenderness and unquestionable valuing of the fruit of her womb, with such a wholly positive affirmation of its destiny; only the voice of the Jew Jesus of Nazareth." This gaze is not one that is scandalized, but rather full of tenderness, of valuing the fruit of that woman's womb; it is the positive affirmation of our destiny that Jesus introduced in history. "And more than that, no man can feel his own dignity and absolute value

affirmed far beyond all his achievements,” except when he feels Jesus look at him. “No one in the world has ever been able to speak like this! Only Christ takes my humanity so completely to heart.”

Therefore, the friends you meet who can look at your humanity that way, can embrace it—just as I felt Giussani could look at and embrace me—are the sign of Christ who comes to you through them. His gaze began to become theirs, looking at you the way they have been looked at; and through them, you can learn to look at yourself differently. Instead of continuing to be scandalized, in them, you find the possibility of recovering the highest and truest things, as you said, because you stop looking at them as something to toss away because you do not understand what purpose they serve. You look at them with all the tenderness Jesus had in looking at the Samaritan who had the same thirst you have when you wake up, the tenderness He had looking at the sinful woman who made mistakes, at Zacchaeus or Peter. His gaze allowed each of them not to be scandalized by what was out of place in their lives—Jesus came precisely for those whose lives are not in place; He came not for the healthy, but the sick, not for the righteous, but for sinners. This gaze embraces all of our humanity. He is the one who laid out the road, and through our friends, it reached all the way to us, because we could not have even dreamed up this gaze, had it not come to us through a chain of witnesses, up to a person who looked at you, you who were scandalized by your humanity. Jesus remains present today, and you can recognize Him just as the Samaritan woman can, because you find someone who looks at you with the gaze she found looking at her. If those friends had not encountered Jesus, they would never have looked at you that way—really, never!—and you would not look at yourself this way, if you had not encountered someone who looks at you that way. Am I right? We cannot get confused about this, making our own song and dance: we cannot look this way except when that gaze begins to become our own. He created a companionship where this gaze can become more and more ours, and more and more consistent in our days; even when our moods change, when we don’t feel like things, when we feel sluggish and a fog descends, there is always someone who looks at you differently, and this allows us to keep walking. This is why, as your friend said, the method is the companionship; not just any companionship, only the companionship of those who look at you this way, and you can recognize it because your gaze is opened up again, you pull yourself out of the sense of scandal, the measure you were using to look at yourself, and start walking again. So, you understand that you are never alone, and not just because you have people around, but because all of us, poor wretches that we are, looking at one another this way, bear witness to the gaze that a Man named Jesus introduced into history, and that reaches all the way to us. There is no other way to look clearly at reality, at ourselves and at destiny (including that of a friend who took his life, or one who is sick), except to look at everything with the gaze with which we were looked at.

This is the most exhilarating adventure in life. Otherwise, we lose our life, and not because it doesn’t have meaning, but because, despite there being a meaning, which we have found; despite the fact it overtook our life, we often get stuck. All our being “stuck” and all our mistakes, however, cannot impede us from recognizing what is true, when we see it happening in broad daylight. It’s a shame we often live like zombies, distracted when it comes to what life is! Our friends, our true friends, the ones with whom you would go to the ends of the earth, with whom you’d face any situation, are the ones who always help us, again and again, to see things properly, not because they spare us the relationship with our own humanity, but because precisely in front of my own chaos, my being scandalized and my powerlessness, they look at me with that gaze that can never, ever, ever be stripped away from history. “I will be with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20). We are fortunate, because He has reached us, and if you, my friend, let yourself be looked at this way, you will be able to look at your friends this way; not based on your “performance,” not because you are successful, but because that gaze has become yours.

This is how we can be witnesses of something that is in us, but does not originate in us, because it is a free gift that has been given to us. How can we fail to be amazed—instead of scandalized—each morning how fortunate we are? If you woke up each morning aware of the grace you have received, it would change everything! First of all, it would change how you feel right before facing the day, no matter what you have to do, because you’ve been overtaken by this gaze! How did the Samaritan

woman wake up after seeing that look? How did Zacchaeus wake up after being looked at by Jesus? How did Peter, who had betrayed Him, wake up after Jesus asked him if he loved Him? This is the life Jesus invites us to live, despite any frailty, weakness, or mistakes we make.

This is the adventure we do not want to miss out on after having come across it in our lives by the grace of God.

Barberis. Thank you, everyone, for this day together. And our infinite thanks to Julián, to Andrea and to all our friends present. See you soon, and have a good summer!

Carrón. Good-bye. Have a good summer!