

Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, November 18, 2015

Reference text: L. Giussani, Recognizing Christ, in J. Carrón, A PRESENCE WITHIN THE GAZE, Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation 2015, pp. 63- 75.

- *La guerra*
- *Give me Jesus*

Glory Be

Certain gestures can only be felt as meaningful according to the awareness with which we pronounce the things that we sing. Only someone who is really aware of what we sang in the first song (“With my own hands / I will never create justice!”) will not perceive the second song, *Give me Jesus*, to be sentimental, pious, and sanctimonious, a decorative element of our gestures that has nothing to do with the urgency of the present moment. Last time, when we introduced *Recognizing Christ* (which we showed in a video on Saturday afternoon at the Fraternity Exercises), we said to pay attention to God’s method. How can I recognize it? It is the experience of correspondence that allows us to recognize the presence of the Mystery. I think that the events that happened this week were an opportunity to verify this, because we couldn’t have imagined a greater challenge to God’s method than what happened in Paris. It’s not that, on the one hand, we have Paris, and on the other, we have School of Community, as if we could remain insulated among ourselves without taking what happened into account. This time it wasn’t possible, was it?

I was extremely shaken by what happened in Paris. I was terrified, and this erased the value of everything, both of the things that had happened a few hours before and of the beautiful things that I saw and lived the next day, and the next, up to today. I am afraid, because it’s as if everything that I have in front of me no longer makes sense: my desires, my job, my friendships. Fear of sudden death, becoming aware – as you wrote in the CL press release – that “each of our lives is hanging by a thread,” has prevented me from enjoying anything in these days. I am thinking: How can I live beautiful things while I see families that are torn apart by the deaths of their loved ones? And I wonder: Where is my faith?

How did you answer yourself? Where is your faith?

I don’t know.

Look for it! Some facts do not allow us to go on without asking these essential questions.

For the past two days, I have been unsettled. To say that I was provoked by what happened in Paris is a given. However, I am taken aback by the fact that my prevalent feeling is a sense of annoyance. Yesterday, as I was being overwhelmed by comments, judgments, and messages, I was angry, I could only think: Enough, be quiet! I felt that everything that people said, or that we could say, was only an attempt to fill a terrible void. It seemed to me that everything was too little in the face of such a thing. I was struck by the fact that, on Saturday morning, I decided to pray Morning Prayer, and the Psalm said, “May He never allow you to stumble! / Let Him sleep not your guard. [...] The Lord is your guard, with His shadow He covers you; / at your right hand He stands. [...] The Lord will guard you from evil, / He will guard your soul.” Right there, the whole question

burst to the surface: But do you really believe this? In the face of what happened, do you still believe in the words of this psalm? This question filled me, and it returned on Sunday morning at Mass when I listened to the Gospel: "Not a hair on your head will be destroyed." I am struck – every day of the previous week had been a step forward in my growth, and I had felt alive. Then, on Friday evening, a fact like this happens, and it's not that it calls everything into question, to the point that the only thing that I did after hearing the news was to pray the Memorare. And yet, a sense of disproportion and helplessness remains. I understand that the point is precisely the answer to that question that arose in me on Saturday morning: Does my faith hold up, even when faced with such an earthquake? What does my daily life have to do with facts like these?

Does faith hold up in front of facts like these? Because we can pray the Psalms, we can go to Mass, we can sing as we did earlier, but does this hold up in front of the facts of history? These are questions that we – not just the others – cannot escape.

The other night, as I heard about what was happening in Paris, I was dismayed. The gratuitous violence, the fact that it could happen to me, or to a member of my family or a friend, made me feel powerless. I know very well – because both history and my personal experience have taught me – that the answers that I, or man in general, can give to evil are ineffective and often unjust, and that we need Someone who saves us. However, the greatest dismay in having this thought was that my faith wavered. It seems that the One who promised us salvation is not victorious, that evil always prevails (also my evil, many times). And so? Do we still hope? Does the whole story that Fr. Giussani passionately relays to us about the first encounter of the disciples, which sparked this great hope for salvation, have any value, any bearing now?

How do you all answer these questions? Can you ask these questions without blinking an eye? Doesn't anything rebel within you?

I look for an answer.

And in looking for an answer, does something come to mind? Try!

I am trying. In these days, after asking this question not only to you, but also to my friends, some of them...

This is what is important, that a journey is set in motion. Try!

This question became a prayer, that is, a question directed at Him. It became urgent for me to have an answer. In fact, what prevails in me is this desire for good, for peace, that everything be just, that at last we can see – as I call it – the valley where "rivers of milk and honey" flow. Thus, on Sunday morning I went to Mass feeling less listless and taking it less for granted, being more attentive. And I noticed some messages there, like in the Responsorial Psalm: "May God arise; may His enemies be scattered." Or in the Gospel, when Jesus talks about what will happen in the last days: "When these signs begin to happen [like those that happened in Paris: earthquakes, wars, uprisings] stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand." In these days, I sought a relationship precisely with Him, I went to Mass, to confession... However, I still have this underlying question: When will we finally be saved?

I am convinced that the underlying question remains. Why does this question remain? Don't think that you can get off so easily! Thank goodness that you still have the underlying question! We must look at this fact. Besides asking, did the disciples have something more than any form of prayer typical of the religious man? A friend who is in Paris says, "I am writing to you from Paris. Thank you for your message. I was becoming more and more aware that my life is hanging by a thread. However, on Friday, as I was running away through the streets of Paris, it became clear.

The verification that you invite us to make opens me up again. I was afraid. I am afraid of being afraid again, but the challenge that you issue to us, to verify faith, and the fact that the Resurrection is real, invite me to go to the heart of what happens.” This is the point: every challenge that we have to face brings us back to this ultimate verification of faith. Another person, who is also in Paris, says the same thing: “These days have been deeply scarred by these events, but I found that I didn’t know what to say, at best some cliché, a bit CL-inspired, but empty. I felt the need to judge what had happened. I wondered, first: What promise of happiness can push a man to commit this sort of act? Second: How can one overcome the temptation to be fearful that would like to creep into me? The need for meaning kept growing. One needs to live for a meaning, and I have met this meaning. Yet, after having seen what happened, the emptiness that I felt, having seen my and other people’s evil, having also seen the restlessness that I have been experiencing for a while, how can we recognize Him present? How can we recognize Christ (who is the meaning who is present)?” We have met Him, but when facts like those of Paris happen, it’s as if this encounter seems empty – an image on the wall, without meaning. Another person asks, “Can I recognize Him once and for all?” In front of these things and these questions – which we cannot ‘close’ by adding a religious touch or some quotes, because it’s not enough – it’s a total challenge to God’s method and to the experience that we have in the present. For this reason, the question that becomes increasingly urgent is: What is victorious in this situation?

“Against the apparently undisputable advance of the powers that be, Christ does not counter with another power, but with a rag-tag human companionship, ‘a companionship of women and men’ chosen by Him, so that His presence will never be lacking in space and time, and with it, as Giussani once said with a stupendous image...”

Not a memory, not a quote, not a thought, not a feeling, but a present reality.

*“Fighting for territory, inch by inch, pushing back the night.” (J. Carrón, “In Your Eyes Shines the Strangeness of a Sky that Isn’t Yours,” *Traces*, October 2015, p. IV).*

“Fighting for territory, inch by inch, pushing back the night.”

*This thought came back to mind particularly on Saturday evening. I was driving to a dinner to sing. As we were driving, this question spontaneously arose in me: Why are we going to sing on a day like this? It is profoundly unjust. It would be profoundly unjust, if that song weren’t born from this awareness that we are “the rag-tag companionship” with which He is “fighting for territory, inch by inch, pushing back the night.” On Monday morning, I started again: going to the hospital, working on my thesis, and taking exams with this new awareness. Every imperceptible step, every charitable gesture – though small – with which I will be able to witness to Him will be His step, through me, with which we will fight for territory, inch by inch, pushing back the night. In front of the sorrow that seizes me, this path seems like the only adequate way to fight. During these days, I felt like the engineers and the architects that Giussani mentions (cf. *Recognizing Christ*, in J. Carrón, *A Presence Within the Gaze*, pp. 64-65). I have tried to build my bridge out of inadequate attempts by reading a thousand updates and flyers, and looking for a thousand discourses. Then, I thought back over these years, over all of my days and the faces of the friends whom I encountered. I have already seen Him at work. Ultimately, only this judgment seems to allow me to breathe: Come Lord, because I am not able to build this bridge.*

Thank you, my dear. Not just looking at something from the past, not just a quote. “Then, I thought back over these years, over all of my days and the faces of the friends whom I encountered [“the rag-tag companionship”...]. I have already seen Him at work. Ultimately, only this judgment

seems to allow me to breathe.” From this, the prayer arises: Come, Lord Jesus! Why? Because it’s not that there is no difference between all of the news, the thousand flyers, the thousand discourses (which are the useless attempts to build a bridge), and that “rag-tag companionship”! Is there a difference? Yes, and our attempts do not make the difference, but something real and present. The problem is that often, when things like this happen, it’s as if this fact were erased. Did the disciples have something more? Had they found something that they could not remove from themselves, no matter what happened? Or were they at the mercy of everything like everyone else? Be careful – it’s not a matter of being consistent! They weren’t better than us. Let’s not go back to the same old moralistic routine, where there are those who are good and those who aren’t. This is not the certainty of faith!

I woke up on Saturday morning and started getting ready, because we had an open house at the school where I work. It’s an important event, so I was going over what I had to say to introduce the students’ work. My husband told me what had happened in Paris. I went online to see, because it seemed so surreal that I wanted to see it written down. I was pretty devastated. I thought: What am I going to do and say at school? What is the point, if nothingness is advancing? Then I thought of the students with whom we had prepared the open house. We had worked on a series of texts that culminated with the question of Leopardi’s shepherd, “And who am I?” As they did the work, the students let themselves be struck by the authors – true questions about life and its meaning came up. I saw these kids let their humanity come to the surface in the encounter with the texts and the authors. For them, life is positive. They have a great need for meaning, but the horizon in which they live is positive – and rightly so. When I realized this, I thought: I have to go to school to support them, to affirm that positivity that exists, at school, in teaching, and in the relationship that develops between the adult and the student. In fact, I intuit that educating in the faith is the only urgent thing to counter nothingness. I am even more struck by the fact that this awareness of mine comes at a time when I don’t feel all right, my faith is weak, and I am full of thoughts that confuse me. Yet, I am sure of what I am affirming now: the only hope lies in generating a new subject. I am not saying that I am capable of doing it, but strengthened by the companionship to which I belong, I want to take the risk. It is the encounter with Jesus that creates this new humanity. I want to cultivate and serve this little flower, which is nothing compared to the bombs, but it exists, and I don’t want to be like the Nazi guard in Morante’s story, who tears it out with his teeth. I want to cleave to the recognition of His victory today.

There is the temptation to ask this question: What is the point of doing anything, if nothingness is advancing? If we remain paralyzed, then that is when nothingness really advances. However, nothingness does not advance to the point of destroying us, thank God, and then one starts to look again at what happens in reality with the students, and she realizes that she has to “go to school to support them, to affirm that positivity that exists.” Then she understands what is appropriate in this situation: “educating in the faith is the only urgent thing to counter [the] nothingness” that advances. Where does this come from? Only from a certainty that makes one realize that “the only hope lies in generating a new subject.” Why?

In September, after more than 20 years of teaching Greek and Latin in a private high school, I was asked to teach Italian and History in a public school. This transition has been very interesting for me. Even though I loved my old subjects and my old school very much, when I was offered this opportunity, I thought that one phase of my life had ended, and so, with a certain enthusiasm, I

prepared myself to start another, which I felt would be full of new things. Obviously, the group of people with whom I associate now is very different from before. Every day I have classes of 28 to 30 students, many of whom have flunked at least once. They often come from families that have all sorts of cultural and social issues. Some foreign students don't even understand Italian... Until last June, I was the assistant principal of a group of no more than 12 teachers, and now I am the newest arrival in a faculty of at least 80 teachers. If I look back at these months, I realize that they have been exceptionally rich. Two episodes in particular struck me. In one class, I had assigned an essay that asked the students to give a brief description of themselves. One of them, who had flunked before, started his essay wondering why, if the world is beautiful because there is so much variety, it is actually so awful. After making an attempt to give reasons for his statement, he started to talk about himself as in conflict with everyone and with the world, and he ended by saying that we are all like Legos: we can change the color and size of the bricks, but we are still made of plastic. This essay struck me very much for how clear-minded the student was in expressing his point of view. When I gave back the assignment, he didn't want to know his grade, but he asked me if I had liked his essay. I was taken aback by his question, because in spite of what he had stated, I thought that it was the expression of the same insuppressible need that I have, which is to be wanted and to find a way to be happy. I answered that I had liked it very much. Then I asked him if he wanted to verify with me, this year, that life is beautiful. He surprised me by saying that he didn't believe it very much, but that he would accept the challenge. Also, in another class, when I was having a hard time getting them to be quiet, I turned to the student who was the most disruptive, but instead of rebuking him for the umpteenth time, I smiled at him. As soon as I smiled at him, he stopped, and turning to his classmates, he said, "Do you see? The teacher loves me." Is this the spark that you have been talking about? I think that it is. I don't know where all of these "processes" that have begun will lead, but in the meantime, this spark has been rekindled in me first of all – I noticed it, and I am aware of it. I felt that I was fully experiencing what you said at the Beginning Day, when you quoted Fr. Giussani: "Experience is the impact of a subject with reality, a reality that, as a presence, invites and questions him ('problematizes him'). The human drama lies in the answer to this problematization ('responsibility'), and the response is evidently generated in the subject. The strength of a subject lies in the intensity of his self-awareness, that is, of the perception he has of the values that define his personality [what he holds dearest]. Now, these values flow in the 'I' from the lived history to which the 'I' itself belongs. (...) The radical genius of a subject lies in the strength of the awareness of belonging" (L. Giussani in J. Carrón, "In Your Eyes Shines the Strangeness of a Sky that Isn't Yours," p. VI). It was very interesting to become aware of this – of having this capacity to smile, of not being worried about saying the right thing or about how to initiate the "right relationship" with students and colleagues – because I was full of a self-awareness that I found in myself and that was the fruit of this life that I have lived and the relationships that constitute it. I came across these words that Pope Francis spoke in Washington, DC: "Go out and in my name embrace life as it is [...]. Go out to the highways and byways, go out to tell the good news fearlessly, without prejudice, without superiority, without condescension, to all those who have lost the joy of living. Go out to proclaim the merciful embrace of the Father. [...] Go out to proclaim the good news that error, deceitful illusions and falsehoods do not have the last word in a person's life. Go out with the ointment which soothes wounds and heals hearts" (September 23, 2015). This sentence was not a directive for a program to be implemented, but the confirmation of something that happened to me first of all. Second, I was moved at seeing that there is no human situation, beginning with mine, that does not desire and

seek that secretum illud that Fr. Giussani speaks about, and at how everyone is somehow trying to build that bridge that can connect them to what they perceive as a possibility, albeit remote, to be happy. It is a path that I want to walk first of all, because I understand that it is possible through a Presence that happens today. This is the Presence that I need to see in every instant, even if one of the signs that offers it to me now is the silence that I have a harder time obtaining in my classes than before.

This hard-earned silence is a small flower. In any case, even a kid with this keen awareness (“we are still made of plastic”) cannot help asking, “But did you like my essay?” The openness to verification stems from there. It seems like nothing, but everything is risked here. It is the only possible realism, like that of John and Andrew. Yet, for us, who are full of conceit, it is too little. On the contrary – this is what changes everything.

On Saturday, when I read the press release for the thousandth time, I experienced how what you tell us coincides with the immediate reaction that I have in front of reality, and from which I then shift. I was struck, because I had been afraid, I had felt my powerlessness – but then we move on and talk about something else. Instead, I was very grateful, because I felt again that the fear and the sense of powerlessness were the great resource that I had for becoming aware of Christ. To the point that, struck by this press release, I immediately emailed it to all of my students and to some of my colleagues. A little later, one of my colleagues, who is in charge of a regional sports association, called me and asked if he could post the press release on their website (so your press release reached thousands of people who play sports...). I was very impressed by this, because for me, when His presence happens again, it has an unmistakable trait that causes me to say “I,” whereas everyone else is talking about the others – what the others must do, what we need to do to the others – and we get distracted in discussing politics, which is the first step to forgetting. Thus, for example, I realized how distracted those who think that they are being concrete actually are, and, on the contrary, how concrete what we often perceive as abstract is. Monday was really striking, because I went to class with this experience that you had caused me to have, and that had spread to my colleague as well. My classes are attended by both Christians and Muslims, which makes the situation rather serious. I went into a classroom after the break, and I saw four of my students sitting there: a North African with an Italian, and an Italian with a North African. They are two pairs of friends who are sort of the heart of the class. I was amazed, because I realized the exceptional value of your press release as a method: I have to start from what I see, and what I see is that, in that class, an experience of friendship is happening among them. So we started to talk about the events in Paris, and I noticed that beginning by reading the first part of your press release immediately fostered an atmosphere of dialogue. Then, in front of certain students who were saying, “We need to have airstrikes and kill them all,” etc., the others objected, but their objections had to start from what they were living in that class. I was struck by this, because can there be a solution for the world that doesn’t take my class into account? If it’s not true in that class, can I propose something for the world? This is what I asked them. At one point, one of my Muslim students said, “I only know one thing: they can blow themselves up in Saint Denis, but even if I wanted to, I couldn’t do it, because my Italian classmate is my friend and I am having a different experience. Perhaps in Saint Denis, they don’t have this experience.” I realized then that what is true is something that offers a possibility now. If it’s not a possibility now, then it’s not true.

It is in front of these things that we have to question whether or not God's method is sound, whether or not it can hold up. Because the witnesses that we listened to this evening are facts; they are little flowers that seem like nothing, but they exist, and they challenge our mentality more than anything else. Therefore, we should not miss out on this opportunity, because the circumstance that we find ourselves living is an opportunity. As you can see, the question grew from personal to social drama, and it would really be a pity to miss out on this opportunity to learn. Yesterday, the text of a radio interview was released, with one of the people who was inside the Bataclan and was a hostage of the terrorists for two and a half hours. At one point, the journalist asks him, "What did you learn from this extraordinary thing that happened to you?" "That life hangs by a thread, and that we have to appreciate it; that there was nothing more serious than the fact that we were still alive." "And what did you learn from them, from the attackers?" "That they needed an ideal that the Western world in which they were living – since they were clearly French, they were speaking in French – the world in which they were living didn't offer. Thus, they found a deadly ideal, made of vengeance, hatred, and terror [...]. However, they realized too late that life is important. Today, I can appreciate that every second that I spend with my relatives [...] is a blessing. The simple moments of life are part of the most beautiful things that we can have, and we don't realize this until we are hit by a sort of electroshock, like the one that I just lived. I feel like I've been born a second time, and I want to make sure that I enjoy this new life that has been offered to me." As we always say, do we have to wait for something totally dramatic to happen in order to be reawakened and become aware of reality? This is the question that arises in all of us. The events in Paris reawakened us from our numbness, and they raised questions that we hadn't asked ourselves in a long time. Therefore, this electroshock that shook us all is an opportunity for us – as the fear, the bewilderment, and everything that we have heard or talked about during these days has shown. An opportunity for what? As the person who survived the tragedy says: in order to become aware of what life is, to live it, both we and the others need a meaning, an ideal. Because there is nothing more serious than life and the fact that we are still alive. What we set aside an instant later with all of our comments is instead the most evident thing: life is hanging by a thread, we depend, instant by instant. It is facts like these that awaken the questions, but it is up to us to take them seriously, it is our decision, as one of our Parisian friends said: "Here the urgency is to re-establish normality, the sooner the better." Others told me of occasions in which groups of people avoid talking to each other, because then they don't have to talk about this tragedy. One can avoid talking, or he can take the opportunity to face it, letting himself be questioned deep down. It is when one realizes to what extent life is hanging by a thread that he discovers his own powerlessness, and that all of the comments are impossible attempts to build a bridge. Here the question arises: Do our attempts fall into the category of the usual empty comments, or is what happened to us something different? Is what happened to us part of this nothingness made of comments, or, though small, is it something different? Is the spark made of something different, or not? This is the first question that we have to clarify for ourselves. Is our "rag-tag companionship" of a different nature, or does it belong to the same nothingness? Where do we see this? We see that it has a different nature in the facts that we tell each other, as we did this evening. Someone might say that they are nothing compared to the size of the drama. However, everything that the Gospel recounts was also nothing when compared with the huge dramas of the Roman Empire! Here the challenge reaches its apex. John and Andrew, or Zacchaeus, or Matthew, or the Samaritan woman: What was their meaning in comparison to the Roman military strategy? Likewise, in front of the issue raised by the Paris attacks, the question arises: Is the spark enough? Is unarmed beauty enough? Each of us has to

reckon with these questions. We must not avoid them, or we will not really recognize the difference. What happened to us? What do these facts show, these little flowers, little as they can be, and yet present? What do John and Andrew demonstrate? And Zacchaeus' encounter? At first glance, nothing – and yet this, like the friendship in the classroom between the North African and Italian kids, is already the sign of the victory that no war, no violence, and no hard work will ever be able to generate in any part of the world. A friendship. Let's accept the challenge to our obtuse pseudo-realism! Because the answer to our questions is not intellectual; it is not made of abstract reasons. Like for John and Andrew, or for Zacchaeus, our answer is a presence. Truth is a presence that doesn't give us all of the answers – for the child, the answer is the presence of his father, not the fact that he understands everything around him. It is a presence that takes away fear, and therefore, in time, allows one to understand. That is why a circumstance like this places us in front of God's method and clarifies – as it emerged from what we heard this evening – the reason why one sings or goes to school or does a charitable gesture, which are all “normal” things through which the newness of Christ reaches people without emptying faith of its historic content. Otherwise, the alternative is either war or despair. However, we have another possibility, which is not nothing, which refutes the mentality that thinks that if something doesn't happen here and now, then we are defeated. This is because we don't have a sense of time! When St. Paul writes the letter to Philemon, he doesn't defeat slavery. Centuries will be needed before slavery is abolished, but he introduces a principle, he introduces a truth, he brings to life a new shoot that, in time, will prove to be far more powerful than what any strategist in the world could imagine. Thus, it is essential to take advantage of these things, of these opportunities in which our faith is so deeply challenged by reality. This is crucial, because it's not enough for us to repeat some phrases; we need to verify. Without this verification, a subject will not emerge that is able to challenge that nothingness that we find, not only in those who carry out terrorist attacks, but everywhere. Only thus will we be able to understand what our task in the world is, what we are in the world for, thanks to the grace that was bestowed on us. This is a particularly intense moment for us. Let's hope that we don't waste it.

The next School of Community will be on December 16th at 9:00pm. Let's continue to work on the second part of *Recognizing Christ*, from page 75 to page 88 in the Exercises booklet.

Pope Francis' speech in Florence. Since we wanted everyone to read the speech that Pope Francis gave at the National Ecclesial Convention of the Italian Church in Florence, we have prepared a booklet in a printer-friendly format that can be downloaded from the CL website. Keep in mind that, today, printed material is not the only way to distribute a text. As we have seen, an email can reach many people. Thus, let's use all of the means that we have at our disposal to distribute it, including social media. It is a fundamental speech, because it witnesses that there is one who believes in God's method. Perhaps it would also be worthwhile for us to believe in this method!

In a recent conversation with the leaders of various regions, the importance of two tools for the life of the Movement clearly emerged, and I want to emphasize them once again for everyone.

School of Community. First of all, we have the need for a regular place where life can be constantly judged, as we are doing this evening: problems, difficulties, facts that happen. The point is that School of Community can become the place where we judge life, not a place where we talk about

something else, where we make comments, and then life's problems are addressed elsewhere. It is the place where we can see what faith means, how the encounter with Christ sheds light on everything. It doesn't solve all of the problems – as we would like, according to our obtuse way of thinking – but rather illuminates life, and offers us an adequate reason for doing things, without any unwarranted fears and without falling apart. Because only when we have this awareness can we then see what we need to do. It's not that saying what we did in the press release excludes the rest, but it helps us to understand what needs to be done by starting from that mindset, as we have always said, and as Fr. Giussani always told us: Christ didn't come to solve our problems, but to put us in the right position to face them. This seems like nothing, but it is everything. We need to learn this. Only thus can we then accompany people in the difficulties that they have. What is more concrete than this work of the School of Community?

Charitable Work. The second great tool is born from the question of how we can learn to become aware of our true need and of the need of the other, which was strongly recalled by the Pope last week in Florence, and is very pertinent to the Year of Mercy and the facts that we are living. That is why our friendship proposes the gesture of charitable work to us. Young and old, let us all seriously ask ourselves: What charitable gesture do I live? What does my community propose? Let's ask ourselves this precisely in order to avoid emptying the Christian fact of its rich historical content, because the new gaze that Christ introduced into the world – as we often see – passes through these gestures. We need to be aware of two things. First, wherever we go (it can be a center for the handicapped or a hospital, a prison or a tutoring center), the needs and the way in which we perform the charitable gesture must follow the directives of whoever is responsible for that place. If, in a center for the handicapped, they tell us that they need help on a certain day and at a certain time, we have to decide if we can do it – but we don't decide the day and the time, because we respond to the person who guides the initiative. It is their responsibility to guide the initiative, and we go there to collaborate, in order to understand the need that we have. Second, the community is the place where we help each other to judge the meaning and the experience that each of us has in doing charitable work, perhaps by having a yearly assembly on this topic. I say this now because some important gestures are coming up: the Food Collection and the AVSI Tents. After participating in them, we can have a meeting in order to ask ourselves: What did these gestures mean for us, what did we learn by doing them? Thus, we will be able to understand the meaning of charitable work, as Fr. Giussani taught us – as you can see, it is useful to both young and old.

The National Day of Collection for the Food Bank will be on Saturday, November 28th. Grateful for what the Holy Father said on October 3rd at the audience for the Food Bank, we wish to experience it by inviting our friends to get involved with us in this gesture. This year it is important to take advantage of the beautiful things that the Pope said, to distribute his speech to other friends with whom we participate in the Collection, because if we are not attentive to the educational aspect, then it will not last.

I also remind you that this year the AVSI Tents initiative is entirely in support of the refugees, as I already mentioned last time.

Christmas Poster. Here it is! Kandinsky! *Free Curve to the Point*. As you can see, it is a surprise that unsettles everyone, that focuses the attention on that point from which everything is born. The image is intended to help us to look there, at that “point” that is crucial for each of us. These are the texts.

The first is by Pope Francis: “For you, for each of you, and for me. It is a love which is powerful and real. It is a love which heals, forgives, raises up and shows concern. When Jesus becomes part of our lives, we can no longer remain imprisoned by our past. Instead, we begin to look to the present, and we see it differently, with a different kind of hope. We begin to see ourselves and our lives in a different light. We are no longer stuck in the past. If there are times when we experience sadness, when we’re in a bad way, when we’re depressed or have negative feelings, in His eyes there is a place for us.”

The second is by Fr. Giussani: “God – the destiny, mystery and origin of all things – became a human face: this is how God appeared in the world. Those who met Him said, ‘No one has ever spoken like this man,’ or, ‘This man speaks with authority.’ God – the mystery, destiny made man – makes Himself present right now to you and to me, to all those who are called to see and recognize Him through a face: a new human face we run into.”

Veni Sancte Spiritus