

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, January 24, 2018**

Reference text: L. Giussani, Why the Church? pp.169-174

- *Si jamais j'oublie*
- *La strada*

Glory Be

Veni Sancte Spiritus

What must have happened to the protagonist of this song, *Si jamais j'oublie*, that she didn't want to forget what had occurred to her? "If I ever forget [...] / remind me who I am and why I live. / [...] If I ever forget while I run / [...] if one day I run away, / remind me who I am [...]. Remind me who I am." How dramatic to have discovered who she is and to need someone who reminds her of it in the comings and goings of circumstances! Only someone who lives all her elementary experience like that can grasp the significance of what we are working on in School of Community: having a place where the truth about ourselves is communicated to us, where the truth of who we are is constantly reawakened, so that forgetfulness may not prevail. Without that we would end up in nothingness. This is the beauty of our journey! As the School of Community says, this happens only by participating in a place where we are introduced to the truth about ourselves, not truth in the abstract, but that "ineffable and total vibration" that makes me become an "I," that makes me have the elementary experience of who I am to the point of desiring to no longer lose it. This is the truth that the Church channels: "*By living within the ecclesial community [...] almost by continuous osmosis, these truths penetrate the membrane of our consciousness, day by day [...]*" (p. 169). Yet, if we lose that initial moment, that initial vibration that made us become aware of what an "I" is, the things that we read become for us like dues to be paid in order to belong, which suffocate us rather than being perceived as the greatest grace (like the protagonist of the song cries out). Yet, this is anything but a given. A friend from the other side of the world (obviously he cannot be here to speak in person) writes me, "With regards to the pages of *Why the Church?* that we gave ourselves to read, I truly have a hard time understanding the connection between what I read and what I do during the day. It is very interesting to know what a dogma is, what an action of the Pope *ex cathedra* is, and to learn about the figure of authority in the Christian community with all of its different meanings, but how do I link these things, for example, with my work today? I found it difficult to see how knowing these things can be useful. I absolutely don't mean to downplay the importance of these things, but I wanted to ask you for some help." Let's leave open this question that perhaps many among us have: what does all of this have to do with life, how is it useful for living? The question is not so removed from us. Let's see whether during this evening's School of Community the usefulness of these things for living will become clearer. Then we will be able to understand the content of what we say to each other. To help us understand how this truth communicates itself, Fr. Giussani uses an image: osmosis. As an image, it has a limited value, and we cannot exaggerate its details, otherwise in the end the image will prevail over the meaning. It is an image through which it is explained how only by staying in a place, almost without a major effort, simply, one can participate in what is happening there. Yet, as you can see, the image

immediately triggers reactions. Someone comments, “I fear this osmosis: one can be tempted to think that it will happen without Him. Then, I find myself...” I remember what a high school kid said at the end of a lesson I had given on the miracles the disciples saw happening daily as they shared their life with Jesus, “I would be careful not to become too attached!” Others, instead, think that the image of osmosis is too weak, “I think that this image is a bit too passive in contrast with the work that you always indicate for us to do: a continuous comparison and verification in our own experience.” Let’s see whether the following contributions can help us understand.

I wanted to ask for your help on the point that you just mentioned. I will read the passage of the School of Community that challenged me in particular: “It is by remaining within, by living within the ecclesial community that, almost by continuous osmosis, these truths penetrate the membrane of our consciousness, day by day, in an incalculable way, enabling us to attain that certainty and clarity of truth which we need in order to face life” (p. 169). When I read those lines, I had a hard time continuing, because I felt deeply challenged. I have lived in the community for many years, but nonetheless I still find myself living my daily life always full of thoughts and strong preoccupations. One lives his daily life giving all of himself: energy, determination, all of himself. Yet, I often get home in the evening and in looking at what I have lived, I look at myself and, sometimes, rather than feeling strengthened, I feel weakened in my self-awareness. This raises questions in me, in the sense that it seems to be the exact opposite of that certainty of truth of which Fr. Giussani speaks, which furthermore is extremely desirable, because I think it describes a...

Do you understand why the protagonist of the song asks someone to remind her? If we who have the good fortune of having this companionship find ourselves like that in the evening, imagine how dramatic it is for a person who realizes that she is totally alone in reality.

So, I asked myself where the problem is, because for me it isn’t enough to live the life of the companionship if I am not present. For me it isn’t enough to live the companionship mechanically, it isn’t enough to be there as if I were soaking in a water bath. I am deeply struck when you warn us that the true risk we run is that our faith is a faith with “an expiration date.” Each time you say this I feel my legs shaking, because you are saying it to us who live in the community. You may say it also to other people, but you say it to us as well.

I am saying it to myself!

Thus, I understand that it isn’t just a figure of speech, but rather a concrete risk, because I see its traces, I already see the signs in my daily life. The weakening I mentioned before is a sign for me. Furthermore, I have also experienced periods of time in which being in the community causes my heart to atrophy, in the sense that the community can be perceived as inadequate. Therefore, the issue has to do with me. Fr. Giussani says that truth can penetrate me if it passes through the membrane of our consciousness.

Perfect! Do you see? When life becomes pressing we begin to realize that in that moment some elements are present suggesting how to respond to the questions we have. Let’s repeat it, “The membrane of our consciousness.” Anything but mechanical!

Exactly. Yet, it is precisely there that I had this question: What can reawaken the “I,” what can make that membrane of consciousness vibrate, that is, allow it to let something pass through, ensuring that the dynamic described by Fr. Giussani may take place, so that a person may attain that certainty and grow? I truly need help on this.

What do you think?

After a very strong impact with the point in the text on the Ordinary Magisterium, I realized how well it fits with life, ordinary life, like the text says. I was helped with this by Beginning Day and by your insistence on poverty.

Since you are an engineer, explain the image of osmosis to us.

Lately, I have often experienced a newness in the way I look at things and my position in the face of circumstances and people in our companionship, that is, the Church, but the scientific description of osmosis helped me understand how such newness can grow. In fact, any kind of osmosis happens when there is a difference in potential, in pressure, in concentration. Without this difference osmosis doesn't happen, everything remains in balance and nothing moves. In this sense, I realized that only if I am poor, that is, if there is a disproportion, and I allow this disproportion to be present, can osmosis take place and a new life enter—the newness that I see in the faces of all my friends can become mine too. This poverty, this staying disarmed in front of the companionship and all of reality, is truly the only possibility that something can happen. It became clear to me that because this osmosis takes place, poverty represents the true possibility that I can be myself and in a certain sense be a protagonist. In fact, this osmosis doesn't take place automatically, in a way that, ultimately, would be alienating. It wouldn't suit me! I understand this because, often, staying with the companionship and being faithful to the gestures that are proposed doesn't bring any newness. In the face of failure and disappointment the final judgment is that all these activities are useless (I said it often!), but this judgment emerges when I think that I already know and I don't admit the disproportion, my need. On the contrary, by accepting this dramatic disproportion I experience this newness within the mysteriousness of our companionship and within all of reality; I see that this newness begins to enter me. This newness manifests itself at minimum as a new knowledge of myself and of reality, accompanied by an unthinkable freedom even in the face of my and other people's mistakes. Therefore, I am no longer afraid at finding myself disarmed and powerless in many circumstances. This disproportion even becomes desirable as I recognize that I am not alone, because that poverty of spirit is the sign of His happening, the sign that the Event is happening to me now, like you said at Beginning Day.

What is this difference in “potential” you mentioned? Explain this better to us.

It is the disproportion with reality that I perceive. In the end, in many circumstances I feel that I am inadequate, that I desire a lot, more than what in any case is immediately available in my relationship with reality: with my students, in my relationships with the people I love most. I realized that by admitting that this disproportion exists—simply that it exists—my position is different, and particularly with respect to our relationship with the companionship, I perceive the other as different. That's it, the other is different. By admitting that this difference exists, I can become involved, and He enters. What is beautiful is that I truly don't feel alone.

Why don't you feel alone?

Because this desire, this disproportion, this drama, are not something that I create on my own. I have noticed that when sometimes I desire to experience these things I can't, and I have to beg for them.

The difference in potential is between what the Church is and who I am. Thanks to this difference we can understand what the Church is and what she brings, and the nature of the difference in potential between the Church and my need. Because everything is not equal; the Church and I are not the same thing. The Church constantly provokes in me the reawakening of my “I” and generates poverty in me. How many times have we quoted the Unnamed lately? The difference in potential is what made the Unnamed, with all the mistakes he had made, find something so different that he exclaimed, “Now I know myself, I understand who I am” (A. Manzoni, *I promessi*

sposi [The Betrothed], BUR, Milan 2012, p. 481). This difference in potential triggered in him such poverty that from that day he would be there insistently, like a beggar, waiting at the the Cardinal's door. It is the possibility for understanding what the Church is and what difference she brings into the world. Christ is so different that He even generates the poverty we need to let Him enter.

Poverty is not an effort I make. In fact, this...

Exactly. Each person must discover it within oneself, within one's own experience, otherwise they are words that one doesn't even notice, and which one can resist. Why? It always comes to mind what Pope Benedict XVI reminded us of in *Spe Salvi*, that "*Progress is possible only in the material sphere. [...] Yet in the field of ethical awareness and moral decision-making [in what concerns relationships], there is no similar possibility of accumulation for the simple reason that man's freedom is always new, and he must always make his decisions anew. These decisions can never simply be made for us in advance by others*" (no. 24). It isn't mechanical, it cannot be mechanical. That is why Fr. Giussani uses with crystal clear precision the word "consciousness." If, when the Lord chooses me to make Himself heard, pulls me out of my distraction and makes me poor again, I don't regain self-awareness and I don't welcome Him constantly, He doesn't pass through, He doesn't enter me! We can find ourselves in front of millions of miracles, like the Pharisees did, and not let Him enter. It isn't that the difference in potential wasn't in front of them, but the membrane of their consciousness wasn't letting Him pass through. We must understand that the image is not mechanical, that the crack through which this difference can pass must always be present. Here lies the drama of our freedom, thank God! That is why I want to reassure those who are afraid of osmosis. It's not a problem, don't worry, because this difference will not enter into you if you don't want it to! The Mystery doesn't take advantage of your being distracted to enter into your home! He passes only through your awareness. I think this is crucial because otherwise we make everything become mechanical; we think that it is enough to stay here warming the chair. This is the formalism that we have spoken about lately. On the contrary, it is our openness—you used the word "poverty"—than can let this newness enter. This is the drama we find ourselves living.

As I read the part of School of Community on the Extraordinary Magisterium I was struck when Fr. Giussani says, "When a dogma is proclaimed in the Church, it is never the fruit of some hasty conviction or ill-considered reaction. Rather, it is similar to what happens to us when, after an encounter or a particularly significant event, a clear awareness of impressions, convictions, or intuitions that we have been harboring for a long time dawns on us, enabling us to give expression to them. For the life of Christ in the history of the Church is a life that grows. The whole richness of the truth is Christ: the life of the Church is increasingly conscious of all [...] that it itself holds. The dogmatic formulation coincides with this leap of quality in terms of the conscience of the Church and, therefore, of the people in it" (pp. 172-173). I discovered that for me it is exactly the same. The same dynamic described here happens to me: I too need to continuously become aware of what is already happening to me. A short while ago I was at a Sunday Mass during which the Baptism of a child that I didn't know at all was celebrated. During the celebration, suddenly I found myself deeply moved and one thought in particular entered my mind: "Am I really here, is it truly me who this morning got up, got dressed and first thing, came to visit You in Your house? Who are You for me, so that I freely decided to come here? Do I love You more than I am aware of?" I can't explain it well, but in that moment, I suddenly became aware that my particular history is interwoven with my relationship with Him and that often, immersed in my ideas and images, in

the thoughts I have about myself, I don't even notice it. I was surprised by the same intuition when I was so deeply moved in front of that unknown child: "Am I really moved because this child is becoming Yours? Who are You for me that I am moved at the thought that also that child can begin to enjoy a relationship with You? You have truly taken hold of me. I know You, this very fact reveals to me that my life is interspersed with signs left by You, otherwise my being here today and this being immensely moved for that child wouldn't be possible." Therefore, a new question arose in me: "Can I truly say that You are enough for my heart?" In that moment I thought of my life, of the faces that accompany my life and that mark my particular history, people who have been taken hold of like me, and all of a sudden, I thought, "I am actually happy. I am grateful for what is present in my life." This realization challenged in one instant all the images I have about my fulfillment (at my age, I am not married yet, I don't have a career, etcetera, etcetera), because in thinking of those faces I realized that the gratitude for His companionship that dominates my life is enough to make me happy. All the questions about myself don't go away, but I was deeply struck by the realization—thinking of my experience—of being already grateful and happy for everything that is present in my life. It was a surprise for me, I was surprised by myself also because, very often, when I pay attention only to my thoughts and images, a complaint prevails in me. This tiny fact struck me deeply, because it made me desire more and more to know, to become aware of what has already happened in my life, to submit reason to experience more and more. "I already know You, there are already traces left by You in my life, but I really need to learn to look at how You are already enough for me, how it has already happened that I am glad and fulfilled." I would really bet everything on this gladness, because I continue to sink back while everything is already present. The point is to know that intuition of an instant that I had, to know that gladness that already exists in my life. I can say that what is enough for my heart exists because it happened to me. I already have everything. We already have everything We only have to know it and become ever more aware of it. This is striking. I am the first who takes for granted this everything that has already taken hold of me, because my life is so interwoven with that relationship that it is almost immediate. Yet, I would take it for granted if it weren't so real.

By participating with ever growing awareness in the life of the Church, a fact like a Baptism can reawaken this self-awareness. To how many of us has it happened that we attended a Baptism where almost nothing happened? On the contrary, when one follows the repercussions, one begins to realize that this being struck to the core, this being struck so powerfully is the way in which Christ makes Himself present, it is the way through which I know him, how the divine passes into me, how the divine reaches me. I know You. At the same time, as we always tell each other, I am not finished knowing Him! His revelation makes Him more and more present as Mystery and thus I want to learn more and more so that I can look at what happened to me, to look at You. That is how the Church makes us know ourselves and Him, because she makes possible a human experience that cannot be compared with any other. What a grace to already be able to say, "What is enough for my heart exists because it happened to me"! Not because I am clever, or because I measure up to it, but "because it happened to me," while many people are still seeking, gropingly, for something that makes life a true life. This is what communicates itself—also to our friend who wrote me from the other side of the world—through this human reality that is the Church. This makes even the particular moment become enthralling.

At this week's School of Community, I was particularly struck by the passage on living the moment as an aspect and in function of our love for everything. Lately, for me living the moment has become crucial for my life, particularly because in the past years it has been one of the things, or

better, the thing I struggled with most. I am thinking of my job: I began to work just a few years ago and I have been dissatisfied most of the time because I didn't like what I was doing. I started every year telling myself that finally this year would bring me the recognition I was expecting. The years went by and the recognition never came. On the contrary, my frustration and anger increased, because I was living every year in function of the next. The present moment wasn't even considered. In those years in which entrusting myself seemed to be the most difficult thing in the world, I begged a lot to be able to live the moment and face the present. Often in tears, angry and disheartened about many things, I struggled to remain attached to the companionship and the friends who most helped me to face my difficulties. In the many conversations I had with my friends, each time I felt I was at the same point, not moving forward. My awareness remained the same and that saddened me deeply. The other day, by chance, I was talking with a coworker and she was asking me my plans for this coming year, if I had some ideas, and I was surprised by the fact that I didn't have any plans; for the first time I was truly interested in living the moment. I wondered how what to me seemed like magic had become possible, but I realized that it isn't a sudden magical effect, but rather the fruit of this work that I did almost unaware. For years, I asked to learn to truly entrust myself like Our Lady, to be truly open, not just to a certain point, like I had always done. All of this passed through the thousand questions and conversations, and it was crucial to understand that the point is not to censor the need, the desire for a good, and to feel fulfilled in my job (because at a certain point I tried to erase everything), but that the only thing that is worthwhile is looking at things within my suffering and my anger toward a destiny that is not completely mine. Being able to live my need without censoring anything, without being scandalized by the fact that for me it was hard, and that I didn't seem to make any progress, was the turning point that finally allowed me to breathe, to look at the "crack" almost with tenderness and to be finally able to live this moment.

The change that the Church introduces reaches that point! Because, one can know everything but not live in the present, never live the present moment, always feeling uncomfortable with oneself. That is why you shouldn't underestimate these signs, because they are a sign of the One who makes the present *present*, the last thing we should take for granted. I always remember the phrase from one of Graham Greene's novels: "For me the present is never now" (Graham Greene, *The End of the Affair*). The most dramatic thing is to never be one with ourselves, not even for a moment. That is why the fact that someone can catch himself living the present like this, reveals what passes through the presence of the Church in which we are immersed. For years we can think that we are stuck in the same position because things happen in time according to a plan that is not ours, but only someone who has the awareness of entrusting oneself realizes that it is precisely that, not some kind of magic, that makes everything different.

It is an awareness that grows, a life that grows and touches an aspect of reality that we face now: politics and the elections.

Here we are at the elections, then.

They come, as usual!

The elections have happened many times since I met the Movement forty years ago (now I am 65). Yet, I realized the grace of having a different position. Generalizing a bit brutally and ironically, one could say that together with many friends who were sons of the 1968 student protest, I have progressed through many steps. At the beginning I followed, often reluctantly, the indications regarding which party to vote for and which candidates (which I supported even more reluctantly) within that party. Next, I supported our people involved in politics, because they were "ours"

(what can one do but support “our people”?). The next step was to support those who defended “our works”, because “the works represent a paradigmatic presence in society,” “long live the works anyhow and anywhere.” Later, the grid of our possible choices widened. I thought I understood that one needed to identify the candidates by whom one felt represented, those who were affirming the founding principles of European and Italian society. Here I was, then, at work, combing through faces and programs: this one a little better, that other a little worse, but perhaps that other ... Today all these positions appear to me to be positions on the sidelines, because ultimately, I am not present. I am not denying anything about the past, in fact my gratitude grows for a journey that I was allowed to make by following the Movement. So now, in looking at the positions that the political world offers us daily, I found myself saying the same words as our friend the inmate that you have recalled to us many times: they cannot behave differently because they have never been treated like I have been treated. What is evident for me is very distant for them because they don’t have an experience in which their “I” has flourished again. To be more specific, I am struck in particular by two dimensions that are systematically avoided. The first is a reading of the situation. I will limit myself to only three of the prophetic reminders made by the Pope. First: no one acknowledges—and therefore announces as the starting point of any action—that we are at war, the “third world war fought piecemeal.” Second: the economic system doesn’t hold because it is based on exploitation and a culture of waste which are devastating people and the planet. Third: migration is an unstoppable and global phenomenon. The second dimension that is ignored is to identify a subject who is qualified to face the problems. In this case too, the Pope never tires of reminding us to never delegate to anyone else, but rather for each of us to take up our own task and responsibility, which creates a people, in the sense of the unity created by each person’s unique freedom. On the contrary, politics continues to propose solutions that assume that politics itself is the only possible subject to be changed. The result of this double blindness is the schizophrenia we witness daily. Yet, today—and this is the newness—instead of being scandalized or feeling powerless, I find myself moved to be involved in the process, to meet the politicians, but no longer as in the past trying to find some benefit for our side or hoping to distill some unlikely economic, ethical, and cultural convergence... (how many times have we been actors in this depressing play!). They are all inherently losing positions because they expect something “from” politics. The truth is exactly the opposite: the politicians—like everyone else—need me, need us. In fact, without a personal experience of newness they will never be able to see and understand and therefore act differently. It is a total overturning of how politics is conceived of. I notice today that politics is mainly lived as a god before which the individual must bow down. The political issue has instead become interesting because, if I am part of it as a protagonist, it goes to the heart of being and becomes an opportunity to recognize the disarming victory of Christ who changes everything and everyone. A presence that is free, light, and creative, in which you are no longer anyone’s slave, because you are bound to the only One for whom it is worthwhile living. Thank you, an immense thank you for your fatherhood.

This is an example of the journey of someone who, by participating in the Christian community and accepting all the challenges of life, grows in self-awareness to the point of making manifest—unmasking any ideological claim of politics without withdrawing from the world—the newness with which we can look at politics. This allows one to offer his contribution while overcoming the temptation, at times widespread also among us, of disassociating oneself, a temptation the Bishops of Lombardy stressed in their note on the elections you can find on the CL website. The personal

journey that was just described is tied to the journey that we have all made within the life of the Movement.

I think this personal journey corresponds to an objective journey of the Movement in the past years. If we don't understand this objective journey, we lose track of a piece of Italian history, not just our own. The objective role of the Movement is demonstrated by the fact that we stopped merely defending our side, our things, in a country where everything ends up in a brawl and began trying to be of service to a common good, to an industrious coexistence, to a real possibility of governing. This is the "political" value of these years that I would like to document in four steps. First: your letter to the daily La Repubblica on May 1st, 2012, which, by admitting our limitations put into play the positivity of the contribution we could make. The second important step: the participation in the Rimini Meeting of two Presidents of the Italian Republic, Napolitano and Mattarella. In recent years they have given expression to that solid bedrock of our country that is concerned about Italy's economic crash and the divisions that could take our country into a permanent decline. In his speech at the Meeting, Napolitano spoke about the need to continue building Italy from the bottom while looking for the common good (and he repeated this when he was re-elected, recalling exactly that speech). Mattarella reminded us that the "we" is democracy and to pass from the "I" to the "we" allows us to look at the future. Then we had a conversation on this fundamental point. Third step: in these difficult years, we continued to try and build intermediate bodies; for example, the Food Bank, AVSI, Cometa [a place committed to fostering, educating, and assisting with the development of children and young people in general, and to supporting their families], Portofranco [a study center where volunteers help students in middle and secondary school with their homework and with remedial study programs] and many others, examples of works promoting the good of all. We have continued to encourage those who are involved in "works." Think of the flier of the Compagnia delle Opere [Companionship of Works] on this unpredictable moment in history, of the idea of building by working. We have continued to stress subsidiarity, asserting that Italy is built by coming together and being educated to build starting from a lived ideal, from the bottom up, while everyone is talking about analyses that skip reality. Fourth step: the many presentations of Disarming Beauty with a total openness in which you, Carrón, met with people who embody the most advanced secular concern for our country; people who are very distant from us, but who agreed on this point: the most important thing for politics is helping to build our social reality founded on amazement, openness, love for the ideal, and faith. Let's think of the many articles in daily newspapers like the one in La Repubblica titled "In politics, too, the other is a good" [http://english.clonline.org/default.asp?id=559&id_n=20175]. Without this there is no coexistence. In this moment in which we must choose, we cannot forget the Movement's political role as "pre-political party", as was written in the flier "Politics, Essential Dimension of Civil Coexistence," which quotes the Pope's speech in Cesena. This is precisely the "political" role that the Movement has witnessed to in recent years—political in the sense that the Pope gave to this word in his speech—a public role, in front of everyone and for the good of all in the form of a presence that can be encountered, not at all spiritualistic.

This way that you describe emerged in the past years also in our university students. They have made attempts that sprang from the experience they live.

That is why before Christmas I asked a group of university students about their experience in their Departments, and whether this experience was helping them to face the upcoming elections.

To answer this question, we looked at the journey we have made in recent years. One student recounts, "Over a year ago the university administration proposed modifying the academic calendar in a rather substantial way. We, the students, didn't agree. I was struck by the different attitude we had as compared to the representatives of other groups, even groups that were very respectable and full of intelligent people with great technical experience. They were angry and annoyed and didn't budge from their "no." We endeavored to understand what the real needs of the university were, and the Dean, once he saw our attitude, involved us in the planning, asking us to be the first to describe what the main needs of all the groups were. Months of work were followed by an effective reform that tries to take into consideration the needs of all. I was struck that little by little the other groups relinquished their initial attitude and joined in this process. Because of the diversity of subjects at play, it was essential to take into account all the relevant aspects. In my experience, having a genuine interest for the common good and not for one's own purposes, something that Pope Francis recalled us to in his speech in Cesena, and being open and ready to identify yourself with the other, are the things that most help to build. After having seen this and lived it, I cannot help but take it into account now in view of the elections." In my department the starting point was a need, based on the realization that the students are forced to study in the afternoon subjects from previous years rather than those being presented in their current classes. We presented this problem to the people in the other groups, and together we worked out a solution. We studied the regulations, and after discussing them with the professors, we presented our proposals concerning the reform that had been presented by the university. After two years, the attempt failed; the mandate ended, and we didn't obtain any change. Yet, it wasn't wasted time: our relationship with our schoolmates who, incidentally, are members of a student group with the express goal of "forcing out CL students" from the advising body, grew, and now they have become our friends. We grew a lot, especially in the awareness that any challenge can be faced in a way that is not determined by the outcome. Our group has become a home for everyone, a place of encounter. It is not a chance occurrence that the representatives of the other groups participate in our meetings. An Economics student writes, "It is the unthinkable fruit of a friendship born of work in faculty meetings and during the most recent elections at the university. A representative of another group asked us to begin a project with him to delve deeper into the referendum [about regional autonomy] that was held in Lombardy last October. He simply wanted to understand it better. A student who until a few months ago we had a hard time even saying 'hello' to in the cloisters of the university, was now asking me to work with him?! I have this desire to understand too, and I am following him! We started to follow him on this project. Our unity is a historical and cultural newness from which the entire university benefits. Why should it be any different with the political elections?" Taking seriously the needs that present themselves is generating unexpected relationships not only with our schoolmates, but also with the academic administration. Another student recounts, "We organized a meeting to explain the updates of the recent law on how to become a teacher. We meet weekly with professors and administrators to understand how it will be possible to take exams needed for the teacher certification. I would have never imagined what happened the last time we went to the President's offices. We had just gone to notify the President that we would have a meeting. As soon as we told him this, the only thing he said was, "Great idea, just let me know when it is, because I have to see if I can attend." The facts we are recounting document that in front of different circumstances there are alternative positions. Another friend wonders, "Do I stay in my familiar environment or do I risk myself? When I was returning from the university to the boarding house where I live, I was tired, and I only wanted to eat with those I know well, to have a break. When I went to the cafeteria, though,

the other women were encouraging me not to eat with the usual people. The electoral campaign was a great opportunity: it helped me to keep my eyes open, to realize what was there, like some young women who were present in my boarding house cafeteria for breakfast, even though nobody wants to talk, or a student sitting next to me in class and everything that exists at the university.” The discovery many of us are making is that becoming involved in political life is first and foremost an opportunity to verify faith. This verification generates enthusiasm and makes us become interested in everything, even the political elections, as a friend says, “I wanted to organize a meeting with my friends of the Movement to challenge them, to talk about what we vote for, about the electoral law, who the candidates are, how the forces at play have changed in recent years, what I look at in order to decide for whom to vote. In these years in CLU, the Movement is educating me not to forget anything that happens and not to remain still, watching from the sidelines.”

These are attempts by people who in one way or another decided to get involved. It is not up to us to decide what provocations reality will give us; the elections happen when they do. When that time comes many people get confused and there are those who think about not casting a vote: “At least not this time, then we will see,” someone suggests. Instead, this situation can be an opportunity to mature. Think of what we have seen and are seeing in the School of Community: the growth of the Church’s awareness doesn’t happen outside history, but rather through the provocations of reality. Many times, a dogma was defined specifically after the need had emerged to understand some aspects of the Christian mystery in the face of a historical challenge, and only by starting to work, discuss, and delve deeper, did a clarity emerge. We cannot do it differently. The historical challenges that put the Christian community to work put us to work every day as well. It was from this work that a greater consciousness of the Church emerged. The elections are an opportunity for us to do this.

We have some tools at our disposal to do this work: first of all, the speech of the Pope in Cesena, which is a documentation, as we were saying, of what it means to look at politics with the desire to understand what the common good is. Then there is the inaugural address of Cardinal Bessetti of CEI [the Italian Bishops Conference] and the document from the Bishops of Lombardy. They all express their concern that in the face of general indifference, a subject full of awareness may grow more and more and help to bring greater clarity, not by allowing himself be carried away by the fantasies of some electoral promises, but rather by having the realism of seeing what can be done in this historical moment, without letting the presence of Catholics in different parties result in the body of the Church being torn apart. Together with the flier of the Companionship of Works, these are very useful tools to help us make a journey of greater awareness.

To use them adequately, perhaps it is worthwhile to be reminded of some points that we should treasure from the School of Community. We often say that we are confused about politics. Yet, look at what Fr. Giussani writes in Chapter 3 of *The Religious Sense*: “*The heart of the problem of human knowledge does not lie in a particular intellectual capacity [no one can take himself out of the game saying that he is not capable, because it isn’t a matter of intelligence]. The more a value is vital and elementary in its importance—destiny, affection, common life [politics, for example]—the more our nature gives to each of us the intelligence to know and judge it [it is through the elementary experience that each person, facing reality, can know and judge]. The center of the problem is really a proper position of the heart, a correct attitude, a feeling in its place, a morality*” (L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen’s, Montreal 1997, p. 30). As

we saw, this is linked to the theme of the mission of the Church towards earthly man. Fr. Giussani recalled what is the function of the Church on the world scene, which is the same function as Jesus: to educate us to the religious sense, that is, to reawaken the “I,” *“In this context [...] religiosity means [...] man’s exact position towards his own destiny in terms of conscience and his attempt to live it in practical terms”* (Why the Church? p. 147). Our “I” doesn’t reawaken only with the elections, but rather this re-awakening is what we are constantly educated to in our participation in the body of the Church, and it can be seen also in how we face the elections. *“The Church, then, urges us to adopt the “right attitude” towards ourselves and life. It calls us back (as does a mother who is experienced in life) to realism and to a type of behavior in which we are reminded of how things really are”* (p. 153), not to believe in ghosts or in impossible solutions. *“The Church’s direct task, then, is not to provide man with solutions to the problems he encounters on his way [thus, not even the Movement has that task]. Rather, as we have seen, its proclaimed function in history is to educate us to the religious sense. This implies the appeal for man to adopt the right attitude to reality and the questions it poses”* (p. 155). What are the problems? Problems like culture, love, work, and politics. The solutions to those problems *“could never be removed from the realm of man’s freedom and creativity. It is not the Church’s task to provide him with a prepackaged solution [this is not the mission of the Church], and, if it were to do that, it would fall short of its own foremost educational attitude. It would devalue ‘time’ which man, who has been engaged by God’s initiative ‘in history,’ is called to consider deeply ‘sacred’”* (p. 156). *“If the Church were to proclaim that its aim was to take over the human effort of self-advancement, self-expression, and human searching [allowing us to do nothing], it would be acting like that kind of parents—to return to the mother image used before—who are deluded into thinking that they can resolve their children’s problems by taking their place”* (p. 155). If it is useless to spare your children from their responsibilities, why ask the Movement or the Church to spare you from them? Each of us has a task to perform. We have the tools, and each of us must play the game, as we said before. What is true for the life of the Church is true for the life of man. Therefore, the challenge is this: so that our “I” is generated, which is something that happens in the Christian community, how do we face the provocation of the elections? What need do we see? The more we identify the needs clearly, the more we can understand who can answer them, otherwise we would be wrong about everything else. Once we have identified and recognized them as real and true, do we let ourselves be provoked by these needs? This isn’t something for insiders, for some expert who dedicates himself to the common good. It is a problem that concerns the nature of the Christian subject. For us the elections are an opportunity to verify faith in the way in which we face real needs, living faith in such a way that we are interested in everyone’s problems. This too is part of the verification of what we are living. Last month we did this verification with regard to charitable gestures, and now we have another opportunity to verify our faith by looking at how we behave in the face of the elections: are we waiting on the sidelines, or does politics have something to do with us? Next time we will document the experience we have had.

The next School of Community will be held on Wednesday, February 21 at 9:00 pm.

We will continue our work by tackling the sections of the text *Why the Church?* titled: “In the Church not everything is dogma” and “The path of the Church’s self-awareness,” pp. 174-179. We should also keep in mind everything we have said about the elections, so that we can verify what we have said to each other.

Pharmaceutical Bank. I invite you to participate as volunteers in the 2018 Medicine Collection Day that will be held all over Italy on Saturday, February 10. Over-the-counter drugs will be collected in thousands of drugstores for donation to more than 1,600 aid organizations that take care of the poor. Many volunteers are needed for the collection day. You can find all the pertinent information on the Pharmaceutical Bank website (www.bancofarmaceutico.org).

Veni Sancte Spiritus