

Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, January 18, 2017

Reference text: L. Giussani, Why the Church? McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2001, pp. 128-146.

- *Monologo di Giuda [Judas's monologue]*
- *E se domani [If tomorrow - Mina]*

Glory Be

We resume our work on the subsection “Implications” in the second part of the chapter “The Human Factor.” Fr. Giussani starts with an observation that may seem trivial, but that he considers crucial. “If the divine chooses the human as a means of self-communication, the man who accepts this method, the Christian, becomes and remains just that—at once an instrument of the divine, but also a man who maintains his own particular temperament. This might seem tremendously banal, but I feel I should point this out in order to indicate the error contained not only in the rejection of this point, but also in the objection often raised to it” (p. 129). Fr. Giussani warns us that the issue of temperament may seem banal only in theory, because we all know that afterwards, in reality, in many situations it truly becomes an objection. Thus, it isn't enough to repeat that human reality is an instrument of the divine to the point of even including our temperaments, because if our temperaments end up becoming an objection for us, they are no longer an instrument of communication of the divine, but instead an obstacle. Therefore, we must look at this objection in our daily life to see how we can tackle and overcome this obstacle. That is why Fr. Giussani tells us that the Christian “makes use of whatever resources he has” and that “the power of God passes through the conditioning of the person He chooses” (p. 130). He also emphasizes (notice how Fr. Giussani doesn't say a single phrase—that we often take for granted because it is so evident— without pointing to the existential step where we get stuck): “This [passing through] is what we are called to understand” (p. 130). Therefore, each of us must ask himself this question: where did I notice this [passing through the conditioning of the person He chooses] in the work on this School of Community? What did I learn? What journey did I make?

When I read on p. 130 that “the communication of God is incarnated in the human temperament. It constitutes a ‘condition’ which God accepts, transforming it into an ‘instrument’ of his plan of salvation,” I realized that for God not only is temperament not an objection, but it is above all a method. Then I thought of another book of Fr. Giussani's that I bought a few years ago because I liked the title: Dal Temperamento un metodo [“From the temperament a method,” from the “Almost Tischreden” series: conversations with young people living the vocation of Memores Domini, Bur, Milan 2002]. At one point during one of the meetings they started to discuss precisely this chapter of Why the Church? A person asked Fr. Giussani this question, “Don Gius, I have noticed that for a while I was objecting to my temperament while now I seem to accept it as a condition that was given to me. Is this enough, or is something more necessary, like conforming to the character of the charism?” Fr. Giussani answered, “First and foremost, if the Lord comes to meet you with your temperament, it is as if the Lord came to your home and knocked on your door. If your room is filthy, all full of mice, spiders and cockroaches, you will get angry with yourself for leaving the house like that, but if the Lord decides to come to your house, what should you do? ‘Lord, forgive me and help me, nothing else!’” Then, he made this fundamental remark, “There is no condition that can prevent a person from seeking and accepting Jesus, neither because of the

subject through whom Jesus chooses to come, nor the modality in which Jesus presents himself. In the Old Testament God used a donkey” (Dal Temperamento un metodo, p. 102). At last year’s Fraternity Exercises you quoted Fr. Giussani reminding us that “the miracle of mercy is the desire to change. And this implies acceptance, because otherwise it would not be desire for change, but pretension and presumption, and it would never become entreaty to an Other, it would not be trust in an Other” (Generating Traces in the History of the World, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2010, pp. 137-138). Thus, accepting my temperament and also other people’s temperaments and their freedom is not a primarily psychological problem, but rather pertains to the personal and unique relationship with the Mystery who makes me. It seems to me that this relates to what Pope Francis told us in his letter of November 30th where he quotes Saint Augustine. In fact, if I don’t surrender to God’s method, the God who accepts and transforms my temperament into an instrument of his plan of salvation, how can I be poor of God?

Regarding the quote you mentioned, what is the first place in which each of us should recognize this “passing through”? Not first of all in the temperaments of others, but in our own. It may seem banal, but often it is precisely this that blocks us. A person asks in an email, “Why should my temperament be a gift?” Because it is given, because it was given to you. If the Lord decides to knock at the door of your temperament—says Fr. Giussani—there is no person to whom Christ presents himself, or modality in which Christ presents himself, that can be an objection to welcoming Him. There is no condition that can prevent this. How much trouble would we spare ourselves if we simply accepted the way in which the Lord knocks at the door of our humanity! No temperament can prevent Jesus from knocking at my door, at the door of the temperament He gave me. Yet, as you can see, welcoming Him is not automatic.

I was very struck while working on this part of the School of Community and in looking at what happens within myself, and a question arose that I would like to examine more deeply. There are moments in which it is clear that something is true because you have lived it, you have experienced it, which can be expressed better according to an accent, to a temperament that you find in yourself. At times, one can have Fr. Giussani’s experience, the experience he had when he said, “It was my own temperament, my own tone of voice, the way I expounded and approached issues that produced this effect of shedding light on some and perturbing others.” He freely reached this conclusion, which surprised me a lot, and which I also desire to reach: “Because of this, I made a note to remind myself and others of the inherent risk [...] [of] forgetting that the point at stake is one’s own love for the truth” (p. 130). Can you help us to better understand this “love for the truth”? What sustains and makes you patient when your accent for reaching truth that you have in mind is not immediately realized, or it doesn’t happen in the way you thought it would? There are moments in which what you intuit as being true may not be recognized right away. I noticed that I am not so free as to think that the “roaring” fire, the “smoke” and the “uneasiness” are all fine and that everything can contribute to His plan of salvation.

But are you always sure that the way in which you face a situation, or your way of communicating, is always true and the only one that is adequate?

No.

“No!” Sometimes, not always, even if it passes through a temperament, our way can be the best form of expression. How often I happened to learn from other people’s reactions which became the opportunity for me to learn something! Often, before blaming my temperament or other people for not being open, I thought that perhaps I wasn’t clear enough, or I hadn’t found the key to the relationship with this or that person. First, I would try and see whether the reason for their rejection

was a matter of temperament, or if the rejection was something offered to me to make a step forward and find a more adequate way to communicate the truth. I learned a lot at this level. The second point has to do with God's method. Even if you communicate something in the right way, often, since God chooses one person to reach others, not everyone recognizes it at the same time. You may have seen something that has a hard time "passing" to others. This makes you realize that, with all the patience God had with us, we too can be patient with others. Third is what Fr. Giussani says later on in the chapter, "The Church [...] was saved throughout the centuries by all those who, in their pursuit of the truth and reality, in their love of value and the ideal, were not shocked by the limitations." He gives the example of Saint Francis: "Saint Francis of Assisi [...] was not shocked at the divisions and violence shaking the foundations of the Church in his time, at the fratricidal wars which set Christian against Christian. Rather, touched by God after a frivolously spent youth, he hurled himself headlong into a struggle which was not 'against' anyone [assuming that there is someone who is against]. It was 'for' Someone" (p. 138). The tension can be maintained by trying to affirm something *for* Someone, not *against* someone. This option always exists. That is why "the great error is to allow one's own error, or that of others, to be an obstacle." In fact, for Fr. Giussani, "personal commitment, although it does not terminate at it, does not exclude a critical attitude. Rather, it is a problem of elementary morality" (p. 139). And he invites us to imagine "a woman who is married and has a small child. [...] One day the child falls ill. [...] At long last her husband arrives and she asks him to lend a hand. He, however, [...] has been working all day, he sits down to read the paper [...] Now, what will be the reaction of this child's mother? Will she say, perhaps: 'Well, if it's not important to him, then I won't bother either'? Or, is she more likely to take charge herself, refusing to allow her husband's laziness to stand in her way?" (p. 139). It is as if all of this has put in motion a human, a very human, journey that calls us to the truth: would I refuse to affirm the truth because the other doesn't understand it? In that moment, we too must make a choice asking ourselves: why do I do what I do? So that the others may welcome it, or because of my passion for truth, even if I were alone? As Fr. Giussani said, even if he had remained alone he would have started over. Even if I am alone doing my work, even if I am alone in my environment, even if I am alone in my family, anywhere, the love for truth, this doing it "for" Someone, can give me enough reason not to give up before even starting. Therefore, it is quite a struggle: "In its paradoxical reality and potency, the Christian fact makes man's true desire emerge" (p. 139); not first the other person's desire, but rather my own, my desire!

A second group of contributions refers to the beautiful metaphor of the gold in the mud (p. 131).

Yes. As I was reading the text this metaphor of the gold kept bothering me, so at one point I asked myself what the gold was for me and how it was present in my life. It immediately saddened me, even if deep down I knew that I had the desire to understand. That is why I am telling you frankly that I always feel that for me the gold—the recognition of Christ encountering me—is a matter of more or less fleeting moments. It is like in those video games (the only ones I ever played) in which you are the little man who runs along a given pathway and once in a while, by jumping up, you can grab a bonus that gives you an edge and perhaps makes you go faster for a few seconds. It seems to me that this is how I recognize Christ in my life. I don't know if it is a problem of temperament. Perhaps it is. Sometimes Christ is present, sometimes He isn't and everything plunges into the abyss of nothingness. Like a light switch: on and off. Even if it is a matter of temperament, this situation continues to upset me, because I don't wish to live always like this. I

am tortured by that time gap between my abyss, where I feel alone, and the moment in which God's initiative reaches me, because that space is a bottomless well, I feel as if I am sinking. I would say that it is a human feeling; I think that everyone has this experience. Yet, it is not enough to say this. Do you ever have moments in which you feel that you are sinking, that you are completely lost? I imagine that you probably have down moments. Yet, you never seem to be overcome by this abyss of nothingness, to be distressed as you are sitting there. Upset, yes, I have often seen you like that, but never showing an anguish full of need, with the shadow of nothingness clouding your eyes. Why?

Why do you think I don't? This—you see—is the passage that one needs to recognize. Since it passes through a human reality, if when it passes through a human reality...Did it reach you through a human reality?

Yes.

If when it passes through a human reality we don't recognize what passes through a human reality, then, like you said, it seems to us that it is something that comes and goes. But what passes through a human reality? Is what passes through a human reality something that is turned on and off? What frees us from sinking into this sense of nothingness?

With regard to becoming aware of what happens, gaining self-awareness, becoming aware of Christ present in reality, which in every instant is rooted in the Mystery, I think that the problem is a matter of judgment. Yet, my reaction—even a considered reaction, not simply an instinctive one—invariably corresponds to a judgment that to me seems to be only a measure. In the end, it has the effect of making me feel depressed and putting me once again at the center, a "me" that is never up to the task. I remember when once during confession an old priest told me that we shouldn't judge, not even ourselves (like Saint Paul says in the First Letter to the Corinthians). On the other hand, I realize that there is a judgment, that is, an awareness of reality, that frees. In fact, sometimes in listening to you I intuit that the greatest mercy is to be made in such an objective way that we cannot avoid feeling bad when something doesn't correspond to us. What is the difference between these two ways of judging? What helps me to keep judging in the way that makes me a protagonist, victorious? Thank you for everything, really.

What do you think is different between the two ways of judging? In the first case, you are at the center and this makes you feel depressed. Obviously. In the second case, instead, you recognize the core of reality and this awareness frees you. Does this "turn on and off" or is it always present? Why is it always present? Because you exist, because reality exists! What makes us live in the abyss of nothingness is this lack of judgment. In fact—look at what could seem banal to us—when we do not recognize the divine as it appears in the human reality that meets us, then we think that it is like everything else. Thus, when the sentimental effect wanes, it seems to us that everything is finished. His Presence is turned off only when we identify Him with our feelings. What does Fr. Giussani continually introduce us to instead? To the fact that the correspondence is synonymous with the divine, that is, with something that is not turned on and off, on and off, on and off. It exists and it is present! Otherwise we could never give an adequate reason for that "difference" that is manifested through a human reality. That is why, if the judgment is not about Him and what appears in reality but about ourselves, then it doesn't free us. We had better learn this, friends, it is in our best interest! God is not like we imagine Him to be, that is, He is not something that is turned on and off. It isn't like that! It is only the divine that explains each of the things that we tell each other every time we get together. We must admit it, because without the presence of the divine we couldn't say any of the things we say, we wouldn't even think about them, it wouldn't

even cross our minds. Yet, since we don't recognize this, it feels as if it is gone a second after and when we go home, perhaps even tonight, we sink into nothingness. We must go deeper into this passage of the School of Community—"Through Human Reality"—to recognize what is present in what happens. Then, when we feel that His Presence is gone we must challenge each other: is the divine gone or is this an opportunity for me to recognize Him? When I go through the mud does it mean that the gold is not present, or that I haven't recognized it yet? If one doesn't do this work, then it really ends up in the abyss of nothingness. That is why Peter's "Yes" gives us the key once again. Why? Because, if Peter looks at himself, if he puts himself at the center, it is normal—as you said—that he feels depressed: after having denied Him, he will expect to be rebuked. If, instead, at the center there is the Presence that embraces him—"Do you love Me?"—this frees him. As Fr. Giussani says, it is a conversion from me to Another who asks me, "Do you love Me?" That is why in the Bible, always through the facts they witnessed, the People of Israel reached this clarity of judgment: "Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you" (Is 49:15). Is this just a punch line, are these just meaningless words, or is this the only way to explain everything that their eyes had seen? This decision belongs to freedom: to accept, or to reject it? Like a faraway friend who couldn't come, wrote about a particularly challenging situation, "For me it is ever more clear, considering the circumstances that I am living, that to live and to discover what I am made for, it is not necessary to have any special equipment, structure, or club membership, but rather to stay in front of reality. In fact, nothing can prevent you from recognizing what happens before you and letting yourself be drawn back by the One who is making you in that instant [it would seem that there was no need for a place and that reality was enough]. Yet, precisely this discovery made me desire even more to follow you and the center of the movement [because that is where I am constantly educated to make this recognition; because it is a particular history that introduces me to this recognition of reality; I can recognize it even while living on the other side of the planet, but I need to be constantly educated]. That's it. I ask for me and for my friends this poverty of spirit, so that we may be constantly open to following in a true way, because I see it first of all for myself as the only possibility to attain an ever deeper and certain knowledge of the One I have encountered, and of who I am. I am grateful to you for this desire that was born in my heart, because it cannot but be the fruit of the work that we are doing." As you can see, to find the gold in the mud one must get into the mud, get one's hands dirty.

I wanted to tell you what happened on Saturday evening, because it helped me understand what you were saying about caring more for the gold than for the mud, and the fact that the divine chooses to communicate himself through a human reality. I was having dinner with some friends, a dinner for which I had great expectations. Once there, though, I was having a hard time with them, because I felt that the way in which we were looking at each other was not enough compared to what I desired. At one point, I was talking with one of them and I was complaining about this. I looked him in the face and I noticed that, like me, he was sad, while all the others had beautiful faces. A little jealous—in part in a good way, but also a bit angry—I went to the friend who had invited us and I told her rather sharply, "I have this difficulty," and I almost accused her and the others of not being enough.

Be careful! In the first place, we blame others for our uneasiness!

The first thing that happened and struck me deeply was that the others reacted supporting what I had said, recognizing that there could be a more beautiful way of staying together, but also telling me why in their opinion, for some people especially, it had been worthwhile to be there that evening. I was particularly struck by a person who I didn't even know, who said that one reason

why it had been worthwhile being there was precisely the fact that I had raised the issue, the uneasiness I felt. In seeing these people who were taking me seriously, both by recognizing the value of my contribution and by underlining my mistake and proposing some work to me—to look at what was present—I truly realized what looking for the gold means. I would describe it as facing and living reality with a positive preconception, that is, with a desire full of waiting, because the circumstance, as it happened that evening, reveals what I desire and is therefore an opportunity to find the answer. How can I recognize what corresponds to my desire if I don't know what I desire? I was struck by the fact that, as we were saying earlier, the divine communicates itself through a human reality, because it became clear that God chooses our limitations to show Himself. In fact, at the end of the evening I was very happy about everything that had happened, and yet, for it to happen, the limitations of others and my personal difficulty (my argumentative approach toward them) had been necessary. I had to make a step and engage my freedom to recognize what I desire most, but also the argumentative way in which I had asked the question became an instrument, so much so that they thanked me for the issue I had raised. I was also struck by the fact that I didn't feel justified in making my mistake, but rather my sorrow increased; and yet, I had not been condemned by my mistake.

Do you see? This is not automatic like we often think. It is dramatic. One must be fully engaged, work hard. This is an example of what I was reminding you at the beginning, “This is what we are called to recognize,” that is, that “the power of God passes through the conditioning of the person He chooses” (p. 130), like your friends. But, if one arrives at the dinner and gets stuck, if he doesn't make this step, he will go home complaining because the others were not up to the level he had thought was needed to be a witness. It was this work, your commitment that got things moving again: “A gold prospector would have never been daunted by the mud of the river bed where he hoped to find nuggets. Rather, he would have been motivated by the probability of finding gold, not by the conditions he might have to face in order to come across it.” Fr. Giussani continues, “It is terrible then to think how easily, in contrast, man can be detached from the problem of his destiny [and I can be content with spending the evening more or less well, detaching myself from my desire for happiness, from the problem of my destiny], to the extent of renouncing the gold because of the mud that comes with it [we will not grasp the scope of these words by meditating on them abstractly, but rather by catching them in action in an experience like the one just recounted] [...] [because] the problem is one of judgment: one has not taken into account the fact that it is the gold of life which is at stake” (p. 131). That is why someone like you doesn't get stuck, doesn't let himself be blocked. This is the opportunity that everyone has: either complaining about everything the others don't do or should have done, or becoming engaged, getting involved so as to discover the gold that is present (in that evening, for example). It doesn't come and go, it is present! But to recognize it one has to get one's hands dirty. And this involves our freedom.

I was very struck by the part of School of Community on freedom, particularly because of some things that have happened recently. In fact, I realize that very often facts that correspond to me, even beautiful ones, do happen, and yet I mount a lot of resistance, even in front of a lived correspondence. Thus, I go home sad—it is as if nothing could ever satisfy me, even if many things happen. I wonder which is the road, whether there is a road, that can educate this freedom, because I realize that if I continue to persist in my idea about things I lose everything.

Do you see? Even if we know it, it isn't enough. In fact, only experience will convince us to stop resisting and show us why it is worthwhile not to resist. That is why your question is very relevant: how can we educate ourselves to this? Fr. Giussani reminded us in a chapter of *The Religious*

Sense that insists precisely on this point: what education to freedom consists of. It implies three things. The first: “It is an education in *attention*,” to the facts that happen to you, “for committed freedom does not necessarily imply attention, because it is not automatically easy to be attentive.” [this and the following quotations in this paragraph are from *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen’s, Montreal, 1997, pp. 125-126] It is the first issue, that to us may seem trivial: even if we recognize the facts, sometimes we don’t pay attention to all that they imply, and thus we are unable to overcome the initial resistance in order to grasp their full import. That is why it is so hard for us. I am surprised, as I was saying to the university students, that the prodigal son decided to leave home because he felt that it was suffocating. What happened to him that at a certain point, after the experience he had, the journey of life he had made, he had this enormous desire to go back to his home? The whole problem of living consists in learning this, like you said: not only learning not to resist, but to truly realize what has value in life. This is first and foremost a problem of attention. In fact, as the Gospel says literally, the prodigal son “came to his senses,” becoming aware of his own desire. Second implication: “capacity for *acceptance*,” because “to welcome a proposal in its integrity is not automatic either.” To accept things, because they educate us to embrace reality as it is given to us. Third: “A correct attitude in front of reality.” “What is the proper attitude in front of reality? It is to remain in the original position in which nature places the human being,” which is the positive hypothesis, the positive preconception, we mentioned earlier. We must enter a reality that we don’t know completely, even if we often think we do. Our friend had a positive expectation for the evening and when something started not to add up, he was committed and raised the question of his uneasiness. Only to those who are engaged with this positivity can reality reveal itself. If we educate ourselves to start from things, responding to the provocation of reality, little by little we will see how this attitude grows in us and how we aren’t always at step one. I hope that this may happen always! When one enters reality with this attitude, everything is different, like a friend who couldn’t come tonight says, “I am in a particularly delicate time at work, facing the risk of losing my job, and this made me angry. However, I understood right away that anger would take me nowhere [with each occasion one wastes less and less time, avoiding the angry reactions, and then what Fr. Giussani says begins to emerge in experience]. In that particularly challenging situation at work there was much more at stake than looking frantically and unsuccessfully for a way out. My person and my faith were at stake.” Man is easily detached from the problem of his destiny: on the one hand the problem of work, and on the other the problem of destiny. No! If one recognizes that in this challenge not only a simple aspect of life is at stake, but instead the way in which one faces reality, as Fr. Giussani says; then one begins to realize what the love for truth is, what to love the good means. The letter continues, “The simple fact of putting myself in this position [just changing attitude without waiting for the circumstance to change, just changing my attitude, assuming the truer attitude, not the easiest or the “apparently” more natural one] made everything change. I discovered the enormous difference between entering difficult circumstances full of one’s own ideas and measure, one’s own reasoning, but rather filled with an entreaty for His presence. Everything changed. I found myself preoccupied but not crushed, tired but not bewildered, weary but certain and even cheerful. I was totally moved when in the letter that Pope Francis sent to you I read, ‘This poverty is necessary because it describes what we truly have at heart: the need for Him. [...] In a world lacerated by the logic of profit.’ I was startled, it seemed written specifically for me.” We need to let the Pope’s letter speak to us like this, not trying to explain it, but through its repercussions, because only then will we understand it without reducing it. Man, insists Fr. Giussani in this chapter of *Why the Church?*, is Christian with all of his freedom. We can accept the challenges that we see, get involved in a

certain way or remain stuck, because the Christian message is linked to man's seriousness and moral capacity; not to my ability to be consistent, but rather to my ability to follow the whole need of my heart, the whole need for meaning, the whole need for happiness, to be myself to the core, to look for the gold above everything else. When a man adheres so freely, then he becomes the instrument of the divine that challenges any human measure.

Concerning what you were saying now, I wanted to tell you something that happened at work, where I can see well how the people who surround us can recognize the exceptionality present in us. I am a nurse and I work in a cancer ward with another nurse who belongs to the movement. The chief physician of our ward is a very intelligent man who declares very forcefully that he is an atheist. Despite this and knowing very well that we belong to the movement, he holds us in great esteem. He never misses the opportunity to say that what we believe in doesn't exist, but he also doesn't miss the opportunity to ask our opinion on various matters. A few weeks ago, after checking on a patient who is terminally ill, he left her room and came to the nurses' station where I was with my coworker. He immediately began to challenge us saying that Heaven doesn't exist, that the lady would end up in nothingness very soon and that we were naïve to believe in that. He started to challenge us verbally. Immediately, we both jumped at the opportunity and started to answer him with a discourse. The discourse was correct, we were saying the right things, but it was striking to see that this doctor, who is much more versed than us in debating, was almost amused because he had a comeback for everything...

He steamrolled you, almost!

Exactly.

But it was just the first round.

Yes, yes. You could see that he was waiting for our judgment, but he couldn't grasp...

He was provoking you.

Yes, but he was not catching something interesting in what we were saying, he was not captivated by our discourse. Then, it happened that while we were there the phone rang. It was a colleague from another ward who needed something. The other nurse, my friend, answered. Upon hearing her speak, the chief gave a start, grabbed me by the arm and, almost annoyed, asked me, "Why is she so kind? There is something in her that I cannot explain, that always makes me nervous."

Repeat the last sentence you said.

"Why is she so kind? There is something in her that I cannot explain, that always makes me nervous." I was struck by the fact that he was nervous because he couldn't understand.

It is this that blows away our measure. This is what we need to explain, friends. It is this: the divine that passes through a human reality. It doesn't "turn on and off." No! We need to explain this; this something that passes through a moment and makes one jump. Without this we are always on the brink of the abyss. Yet, the problem is not when you are on the brink of the abyss, but rather when you don't recognize what another person is recognizing, that is, this "something" beyond the kindness. What is this something beyond the kindness?

I was also surprised to see our dualism in front of what happens. I am convinced that people do not need discourses, but they rather need a presence. I am totally convinced of this, but I was struck by how, as soon as he started to provoke us, I proposed to him a discourse. The first thing that we did was that. What struck me next was—and I saw it in the way my coworker moved—that we are so much in relationship with Christ that in the ordinary moments, due to the way in which we move, we are signs of something else and we don't realize it. I thought of this and I told myself: I made the effort of explaining and Christ was not present, then my coworker answered the phone

and the chief moved, became nervous. In seeing how this made him shift, it came to mind the phrase that you always tell us, “The man Jesus of Nazareth [...] they didn’t see this man do one single action whose form didn’t show his awareness of the Father” (L. Giussani, “A New Man,” Traces, no. 3, 1999, p. IX). The new step I made is that this is freeing. The fact that people are struck by how we live, which witnesses to our belonging to Christ, is freeing, because at that point it’s up to that person’s freedom to make the next step. To see a man who is so convinced of being an atheist and to see such a question emerge in him, a simple question (“What is there beyond this kindness?”) made me think a lot about the way in which I live. I asked myself: but you, Christ, are you everything for me to the point that by the way in which I answer the phone the heart of a man can move? I think that the answer to this question is the greatest companionship we can offer to people. I mean, our belonging to what happened to us is the only companionship we can give to other people.

No matter the position of the other, because nothing can stop a man from being startled in front of a kindness that contains “something.” This something beyond the kindness: this is the human reality that becomes an instrument of the communication of the divine. It is an exciting human journey that invites us constantly, that calls us tirelessly not to stop at the sentimental repercussion, but to look for the gold beyond the mud.

In front of a fact that moves us, asking the question, “Where does it originate from? Who is giving it to me?” and therefore letting yourself be surprised by His presence that makes it happen, is a method of knowledge and a nourishment that makes us take possession of the present, and through the particular history of this present goes beyond the limits of time and space. Because I always— it always happens; it has happened seventy times and it will happen again seventy times seven— stop at the sentimental repercussion that afterwards wanes under the blows of each day.

Pay attention, what wanes is the sentimental repercussion, not Christ who constantly gives us a jolt.

And so, this slightly rotten taste of something that died remains in the mouth and in the soul, something that you think you have lost forever. At least this is how we feel, we modern people who have a reduced perception of ourselves. But it isn’t like this, because finding again in one’s heart the inconvenient and burning gift of our need, letting it explode, allowing the heart to stop hardening and instead letting it suffer, opens it to the possibility of being filled by His presence. Because when I forgive I finally feel my heart burning again, as it happened at the time of our first love, and this makes me live His presence now and reconquers everything, because it resurrects everything, even what I had lost in the past, it gives it back, it brings it back to life. In fact, this thing was born because I saw that otherwise for me it wouldn’t have been possible to be moved during a small Christmas party, 23 days after it happened, by reading the School of Community and remembering it! During this party, while with the choir I had even taken pictures, a ton of pictures, but I had not been moved.

It is not enough to be there like tourists who take pictures, but without being moved.

So, the limits of time are somehow defeated, overcome. The limits of space as well, because one can see from the people whom you call to give a contribution, or that you quote here at School of Community, that they are literally coming from the ends of the earth. This need allows the heart to be attracted by what you are telling us. The effort of following you (because it is linked to the path of the last two Schools of Community) makes faith exciting, life alive, and the heart wounded. My limit doesn’t stop Him and He really invents all sorts of things to come and take me back, yes me. He looks for me while almost always I am not looking for Him day and night, lost in the galaxy

of my interests—when you say that I always feel terribly rebuked. And yet, He comes back to look for me. Therefore, I realized that even if I don't look for Him, it is Christ who looks for me. Nothing is so beautiful as this sorrow and this gratitude, nothing can compare with this, because it is the power given to you by the fact that you discover that you are loved unconditionally by Him who comes back, and comes back always. "Come Lord Jesus!" Finally, I said it. This is what marked the time of my journey following you. I am not hiding the fact that even if your proposal is crystal clear, often bordering on being harsh, so that I never leave a meeting with you without having taken a good beating, I have the feeling that among us this entreaty is often made as another effort of our heart. Our heart should become good at waiting, without bowing to the fact that our first and only possible activity is, like Fr. Giussani described in such an amazing way, the "passivity" of our need, of our nothingness that needs the You and cannot do anything but recognize Him. Therefore, one often perceives something that is not the warmth of friendship, but an icy checking on you: "Did you go to School of Community?" "Did you pay the Common Fund?" etc., which are all useful things, but presented like that, are not beautiful and unfortunately become a curse. I almost never encounter someone who is willing to stay inside the pain of my need, helping me to live and become aware of our hunger and thirst for Him. Instead, you stay there. Only in my journey with you can this be faced with a right perspective. So, thank you because you don't let go of me, because you don't give up and therefore you don't give up on us. A while ago—in front of the constant and annoying harassment of those who challenge and criticize you quite strongly, and who often are not looking for the truth, but are only after self-recognition—I felt like writing you that I was on your side. However, I find even more annoying those who always agree with you, as if following you were always normal and trivial, as if it were easy, business as usual. Today, though, along the journey that you help us make, following Fr. Giussani and the Pope, on the path of the charism, I only want to thank you, because you are with me, because I have truly seen that you, like Jesus, would be with me even if I were against you. Therefore, thank you and have a good journey.

This is the exciting journey of life.

The next School of Community will be on Wednesday February 22nd, at 9:30 pm.

We will begin a new chapter: "A Mission of the Church: Towards Earthly Man." We will work on the first five points, pp.146-156.

This evening there wasn't any contribution that addressed the last part of the previous chapter "By Means of the Era and the Historico-Cultural Environment." In this part, Fr. Giussani says, "Christianity is not in the world to hollow out the dynamic of historical evolution. Rather, its purpose is to communicate certain values [...] and if these values are preserved, then every evolution has the means to become more useful as an expression of man." It is precisely on this point that we had a really hard time this past year. The fact that the battle against slavery began with the writing of a letter, like Saint Paul's concerning Philemon, is quite a challenge. Fr. Giussani offers other examples to show that "the value brought by Christianity is something that concerns man as man in any circumstance" (p. 142). This means that "the Church certainly does not presume to empty the human affair of all that historical evolution injects into it. [...] Faith tailors and determines the personality of the individual [...] enabling the individual to use the means which his personal talents and historical conditioning will prompt him to use" (p. 144). For this reason, I ask you to continue to work on pp. 141-146, to understand the connection between these pages and the next chapter. Fr. Giussani adds, "This is a fact not easy to accept [even for us it is not easy], but it is the way of the Christian message." "God-made-man has communicated Himself

from ‘inside’ human reality, from within the confines of precise historico-cultural contexts” (p. 144). This is God’s method, says Fr. Giussani. If we do not understand this, then we get stuck in useless discussions, because the problem is not who wins the discussion, but rather who considers all the factors at play. This will help us to understand much better what the mission of the Church toward man is.

This evening we heard people quoting Pope Francis’s letter. I was asked to give some explanations. I don’t want to explain the letter. I could have provided some explanations in the first letter that I wrote when I sent you the Pope’s letter. I don’t want to write my version of the Pope’s letter and that is why I didn’t say anything about its content. We should give ourselves the time necessary to understand it based on the facts of the experience we live. At another time, we will find a way to review and summarize the experience we had. We should let our experience grow before our eyes, so that it may help us recognize more and more the breadth and importance of the Pope’s letter.

The Book of the Month for February and March will be Louis De Wohl’s *The Spear: A Novel of the Crucifixion*, Ignatius Press. The novel tells the story of the Roman centurion who hurled his spear into the side of Christ on the Cross. It is the story of ordinary people, each with their sorrows, religions and skeptical views, who at a certain point (it could be us), by chance, encountered Jesus, perhaps even just through some of His words or a miracle reported by others, or like when Longinus is at the foot of the Cross holding his spear.

I invite you to participate as volunteers in the Day for the Collection of Medicines that will be held all over Italy on Saturday, February 11th. In the pharmacies that join this initiative and display the flyer, it will be possible to purchase one or more over-the-counter drugs that will be donated to assist the great many indigent people who cannot afford medical care. The poor assisted by the Pharmaceutical Bank are over 14,000. Many volunteers are needed on the day of the collection. You can find all the pertinent information on the Pharmaceutical Bank website www.bancofarmaceutico.org.

Veni Sancte Spiritus