

*Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, February 21, 2018*

Reference text: L. Giussani, Why the Church? pp. 174-179

- *Simple As This*
- *Noi non sappiamo chi era [We don't know who he was]*

Glory Be

Veni Sancte Spiritus

We sang, “*I been in search..., I went looking for..., I tried..., I traveled..., But it only let me down..., Oh, the answer, well / Who would have guessed / Could be something as simple as this?*” [Jake Bugg, “*Simple As This*”]. It is simple, like happened to Peter, or to Dismas, or to Paul. In *The Religious Sense*, Fr. Giussani says that truth is something that one discovers provided that he pays attention. It is so simple! In participating in a place like the Church we too can find what we are looking for. Yet, “*In order to understand the Christian fact [we read in the text on which we worked while preparing for this evening’s meeting] we must constantly refer to life*” (*Why the Church?* p. 176). The Christian fact reveals itself to our eyes in all its full significance only in life. If we recognize this, the pages of this chapter, which initially may have appeared abstract, acquire an unknown value, and what seemed to be abstract becomes incisive, something a friend who could not attend this evening because he lives far away wrote about to me, “I began the day discovering that I had forgotten a friend who had asked for my help.” This was his cue to take the initiative: “Feeling dismayed, I felt the need to reread the notes of the last School of Community where it said that ‘only by participating in a place are we introduced to our own truth,’ to that ‘ineffable and total vibration’ that makes me become an ‘I.’” When one becomes aware of that, “there are two options: either running away, thinking that in the end the fact that I forgot was not very important, or following” what one has encountered. “I recognize that this second option is what I desire for myself, to follow what gave me a jolt.” Why? For what reason? “Because the second option is the only one that can put me back in motion in front of circumstances. Then, the School of Community becomes the way that punctually reminds me of a path, of some faces without which speaking of the ‘Body of Christ’ wouldn’t make sense. It reminds me of who I am. Thus, the ordinary magisterium becomes that sharing of life, that lived life, that ‘faithfulness to the life of the ecclesial community’ that educates you to recognize Christ, and therefore to paying attention” to what happens in your life, which sets you back in motion. That is why a dogma is no longer perceived as something abstract and begins to be recognized as “a way in which Christ reaches even the last man on earth,” even a wretch like me, to set me in motion again. Only when one experiences how correspondent what happens in the Christian community is, does one begin to perceive the value of what would otherwise seem abstract, not interesting, without relevance for his life. Yet, there is someone among you who doesn’t think that the pages on the ordinary and extraordinary magisterium are abstract, isn’t there?

The interesting and dramatic question that arose in our School of Community this time concerns authority. While discussing with some friends it turned out that they found this chapter irritating, that it wasn't useful to their personal search for God. On the contrary, they felt that the Church as authority and hierarchy (bureaucracy, that is, the Vatican) is harmful and hinders the encounter with Christ. They perceived the pages on the magisterium as a monument to this Church as power, which has nothing to do with Christ and his Gospel. We decided to ask your help on this point.

We begin with a big challenge! No joking around here, otherwise this conversation would no longer be interesting! Without questions like these why would having School of Community be interesting? Is what we are saying an obstacle, or is it helpful?

I begin to answer this wonderful question by reading the witness of a person who documents that the Christian community not only is not an obstacle to seeking God, but is rather what sets the seeking in motion and allows a person to follow a path of seeking, freely. "Dearest Julian, I am 58 years old and I have known the Movement since 1978. My best friends in high school were in the Movement. I used to spend hours with these friends, I referred to them for many aspects of my life, but I rejected the structure, the rules; I bragged about my independence. The priest of the Movement noticed me, and he always greeted me with a great smile, without any demands. I enjoyed this goodness, but I stayed on the sidelines, I didn't want any label or obligation. I lost track of those friends during my years at college, but later I found them again, and among them I met again a schoolmate from my high school who eventually became my husband. He belonged to the Movement, but I pretended that that was 'his story.' I didn't want to be part of it. The few times in those years (it was the Nineties) when I participated in School of Community I went home disappointed and embittered because I clashed with the claim many had of being superior to others and their being self-congratulatory, something I always found annoying. When I was a teenager I had met other groups and I never thought that the Movement was the best way for everyone. In the 28 years of my marriage I spent time with many of my husband's friends and I experienced concrete help for my life. They never looked at me with the claim of converting me. They offered me their friendship and I gladly opened my home for their meetings and went on vacation with them. I got involved little by little, but always with the initial instinct of defending myself from any label and any 'definition' that could somehow hinder my relationship with other friends and coworkers whom I never considered inferior, less worthy, than the people of the Movement. In recent years I maintained my conviction that the other, any other person, is a good, is a mystery, is a gift for my life. Yet, this openness to the other that I always thought was my strength, has now turned into a question to myself. What always prevented me from joining the Fraternity? Ultimately, it was the claim of being better than others, the pride and the illusion of feeling free and independent. Yet, in the concreteness of my life I look for these friends, I look for your texts, I listen to and I sing your songs, I participate in the gestures you propose, I read the books that are suggested and...I run away from a 'yes.' Yes, I am saying this. I too need a place that helps me grow, I too need to surrender to a good that I have encountered and let myself be guided, trusting in the hundredfold that is promised. I don't gain the hundredfold by shielding myself, fearing what others might ask of my life. I want to learn to entrust myself because Christ has had infinite patience with me. He must have laughed at all my 'touch-and-go.' I sent Him away but He knew how to win over my heart again. I am asking to enroll in the Fraternity. I am not clear about everything, but I no longer want to run away from the good I have received in this place, and to

remain attached to Christ I need faces and a place. I already have them close to me, what is missing is my 'yes,' my surrendering to what I have already seen."

We see how this person took all the space of freedom—without anyone forcing her to do something—to make a journey that little by little brought her to perceive as relevant to her life what she had refused before. This difficulty that makes dogma and authority be perceived as an obstacle was tackled by Fr. Giussani in the text of the School of Community. Those who perceive the dogma as something "dictatorial" that hinders the journey of reason and freedom, perhaps have not understood the method by which the Church arrives at proclaiming a dogma, which is "*the definitive formulation of a consciousness of the truth of which the Church is custodian*" (p. 176). Fr. Giussani gives an example that can help us understand how the Church arrives at the formulation of a dogma: "*This is analogous to the most common of life's experiences. When we were five or ten years old, we had a certain attitude to life that corresponded to circumstances particular to our own experience, reflecting our personalities, even at that age. Yet, as we grew older, some of our ideas were subjected to expressive changes, although they remained within the unitary expression of our personality. The same is true of the history of the Church*" (p. 176). In our experience we reach a certain clarity little by little, becoming aware of things that were not ours before. In the history of the Church the exact same process takes place. If one denies that it happens in the history of the Church, he should deny it in his own experience as well. That is why, sometimes, to help us understand what we find hard to accept in the life of the Church, we must refer to our experience of living. "*As time goes by and in the encounter with the circumstances and events provoking it, the Church [...] becomes increasingly conscious of self*" (p. 176), that is, of something that she didn't understand before. This is not against reason or freedom, it isn't something dictatorial. In fact, when someone reaches this clarity little by little, he desires even more to find something that helps him live. Thus, since the Church is a life, only by participating in that life, like this person did, can she attain a clarity about what she proclaims.

This introduces us to an even more radical question, that is, the objection raised by Nietzsche that all the believing, the accepting what the Church proposes to us, is opposed to seeking. This matter is tackled in the Encyclical *Lumen fidei* written jointly by Benedict XVI and Pope Francis, "*In speaking of the light of faith, we can almost hear the objections of many of our contemporaries. In modernity, that light might have been considered sufficient for societies of old but was felt to be of no use for new times, for a humanity come of age, proud of its rationality and anxious to explore the future in novel ways. Faith thus appeared to some as an illusory light, preventing [this is the point!] mankind from boldly setting out in quest of knowledge [this was the slogan of the Enlightenment: Sapere aude, have the courage, the audacity of knowing]. The young Nietzsche encouraged his sister Elisabeth to take risks, to tread 'new paths... with all the uncertainty of one who must find his own way,' adding that 'this is where humanity's paths part: if you want peace of soul and happiness, then believe, but if you want to be a follower of truth, then seek.'* [Search. This is the phrase the Pope comments on, as follows:] *Belief would be incompatible with seeking. From this starting point Nietzsche was to develop his critique of Christianity for diminishing the full meaning of human existence and stripping life of novelty and adventure. Faith would thus be the illusion of light, an illusion which blocks the path of a liberated humanity to its future. In the process, faith came to be associated with darkness. There were those who tried to save faith by making room for it alongside the light of reason. Such room would open up wherever the light of reason could not penetrate, wherever certainty was no longer possible. Faith was thus understood either as a leap in the dark, to be taken in the absence of light, driven by blind emotion,*

*or as a subjective light, capable perhaps of warming the heart and bringing [some] personal consolation, but not something which could be proposed to others as an objective and shared light which points the way. Slowly but surely, however, it would become evident that the light of autonomous reason is not enough to illumine the future; ultimately the future remains shadowy and fraught with fear of the unknown. As a result, [paradoxically] humanity renounced the search [the opposite happened: it wasn't faith that hindered seeking, but rather lack of faith blocked it] for a great light, Truth itself, in order to be content with smaller lights which illumine the fleeting moment yet prove incapable of showing the way. Yet in the absence of light everything becomes confused; it is impossible to tell good from evil, or the road to our destination from other roads which take us in endless circles, going nowhere” (Encyclical Letter *Lumen fidei*, no. 2-3).*

In fact, only someone who has found something, like Saint Paul, can say, “*Forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal*” (Phil 3: 13-14). He can state that precisely because of what he has encountered. Now we must verify, in facing the circumstances that we must deal with, whether our participating in this place that is the Church, in the work of School of Community, made us go forward or blocked us.

As I re-read the School of Community I realized that I made a small step forward in awareness. It is true that in the Church (I don't know whether this is correct, but I would say also in the Movement) not everything is a dogma, but it is interesting to live everything in light of the Church's pedagogical function, of her task of educating, so that the proclamation of a dogma always has as its goal the mission that she must fulfill “within the great pedagogical task of educating man to Christ.”—During these days that are very intense and full of provocations on many fronts, I began asking myself whether in a text that speaks of ordinary and extraordinary magisterium one could find some suggestions for living. Yet, I still had the preconception that in the end they would be rather abstract suggestions and that the criteria for looking at and observing what I must live would have to come from another source! For example, what does all this have to do with the mysterious fact that last Friday a 15-year-old student of mine, after being ill for two years, fulfilled his life in a way that we all hoped would be different? Or, what does the ordinary and extraordinary magisterium have to do with the provocation of the elections? Until I was struck by one or two things that you highlighted. The first is what you said at the Diakonia of Lombardy when you told us that our belonging to the Church, this being immersed in this “ordinary magisterium,” gives life to everything we see—and that I am seeing as well: initiatives of dialogue, moments of work to see what is at stake, friends who don't avoid answering many questions aimed at understanding what the common good truly is. The positive outcome that we see, you were saying, is the growth of our own and of others' “I”, that is, the birth of a new creature. The second thing you highlighted is what you said when they interviewed you after your audience with Pope Francis. When asked what in your opinion is the newness of Pope Francis's magisterium, you answered that the greatest contribution is “to make us aware of this change of epoch that challenges all of us [...] and to see the concrete ways in which today the Church faces the world and the challenges that affect us” (L'incontro oggi tra Francesco e Don Carrón, president of CL [“Today's Encounter Between Francis and Fr. Carrón, President of CL”], interview by A. Masotti, vaticannews.va, February 2nd 2018). In the blink of an eye, your remarks brought me back to the work of School of Community. I noticed this common denominator: what eliminates any abstraction is this experience of Church that you described, as we can read in the text, “The Church [...] is a life, and it is so easy to miss this point. It is the life of One [...] that develops through time within the living organic nature of His People. [...] [It] is a life which becomes

increasingly conscious of self as time goes by” (p. 177). *Your words immediately put me back in front of what my eyes have seen in the past few weeks, without, however, realizing it. With regards to the death of my student, I couldn't separate that fact from having seen his mother, a mother who was facing the death of her son, reassuring the doctor. He—an atheist—told her that from a human point of view he envied her having seen her live such a trial that for him, as a doctor, was only a defeat. She answered him, “For us this death is not a defeat. My son is in Paradise and we are like this because of the history to which we belong.” As if to say: we are the fruit of a life educated in the Church. The second aspect I intuited as a fruit of this pedagogical task is that saying, “Now we can be definitively sure about that!” (like when a dogma is proclaimed) in this circumstance of the elections doesn't arise from the fact that everything adds up, or because we are sure of a strategy, but from being immersed in the Church, as you reminded us, “As time goes by and in the encounter with circumstances and events provoking it, the Church [...] becomes increasingly conscious of self [...] certain in its adherence to authority” (p. 176). This is something we can be definitively sure about. I am grateful, because I look at your authority with obedience and I look at all our friends who let themselves be challenged by it every day as the extraordinary way to discover the truth of myself in what is ordinary.*

As we can see, each person verifies in reality, in front of the challenges of life, not in his own thoughts. In front of a student who passes away so young, in front of the challenge of the elections, one sees whether belonging to the Christian community spares him or spurs him to seek, to understand. A person who has nothing to see is blocked in front of the darkness of death. Instead, one who belongs to a place that opens wide the horizon of reason doesn't take comfort in a sentimental way of living but begins to grasp the full significance of what he is being told. For example, he realizes that the dogma of the Assumption challenges his reason, because it is saying: life's value is not in being successful, it isn't about our ideas. The value of life consists in the fact that it is destined to that victory that has already happened in Our Lady. That is why we can look at our student, at our friend, with the same gaze with which his mother looks at him. We don't leave reason in the closet! We can even look at death with this awareness, and then everything becomes a provocation that sets our seeking in motion. Now we see it also with respect to the provocation of the elections. The starting point for understanding the significance of what we live is the total disillusionment people have in these elections. Does the disillusionment that we too may experience depend perhaps on the fact that we belong to the Church?

Lately things have been amazing!

“Lately things have been amazing!”

If I hadn't already been taken aback by your proposal of verifying faith in our charitable gestures, now I have been blown away. How can we verify our faith by how we act in front of the elections? This is anything but living in the abstract world of our ideas, like some think!

I never took the work on the elections as seriously as I have this year. I began to study all the texts that had been suggested to go deeper, to know more.

So, did faith push you to study to know more, or did it make you think that you already knew? We must verify in our experience the objections that arise in us: faith didn't block you at the “I already know,” but rather set in motion your reason, your desire to know.

It was an exceptional opportunity. Who would have ever expected it?

Perfect! “Who would have ever expected it?”

The most beautiful thing ever has been to see many people around me putting themselves to work, serious work, starting from their experience, some from their relationship with their children, some

from the demands of their job, in a constant comparison. In short, your proposal generated turmoil about this topic of the elections that many of us, myself first, have always wished with their whole heart to come and go as quickly as possible, while we impatiently wait for some friend to take a stand so that we can have the opportunity to jump on the bandwagon. The personal initiative that this proposal has aroused shows the amazing process of a new “I” being generated, an “I” that desires to be a protagonist now. All this turmoil generated from within the work of School of Community the desire of getting together with others to discuss the elections, not as the “usual” initiative proposed by the current leader of the community, but truly as a personal need to verify our own journey, to become aware of how we are on a journey within this place—one that follows history and our own personal history—that is called “Church.” I am moved and grateful for this totally unexpected step.

Do you see? In relation to the elections we can verify whether someone who has encountered something that helps him live continues to search or has stopped searching and then, as happens to many, disillusionment wins. It is exactly in front of this disillusionment that we must verify our faith. As Cardinal Bassetti reminded us, “As Bishops, we join first of all the Head of State’s appeal to overcome any cause of disillusionment and disaffection [the Church is inviting us not to succumb to this first reaction, as often happens] and go to the polls with a sense of responsibility towards the national community.” As a social and historic reality, the Church invites us to try to “reach”—says again Cardinal Bassetti—“a real cooperation in the service of the common good.” (*Inaugural Address at the Permanent Council of CEI, January 22, 2018*). The first contribution the Church offers to us, who—like our friend said—may desire with our whole heart that the elections come and go as quickly as possible, is that of setting us in motion again. Without a place that educates us to move, without making a journey, one can content himself with what he has and then disillusionment prevails.

While I was reading the School of Community something happened to me. I shall start by saying that in the past weeks I changed jobs and the interaction with my new coworkers has been difficult. I don’t particularly like how they work and that has made me build a big wall against them. In the past few days I noticed that I go to work thinking that after x hours I will finish my shift, and I realized that this attitude made me feel well and at peace. When I became aware of this dynamic, I intuited that something was wrong, because in my history living like that was never enough for me. Yet, I was stuck at this point.

Do you see how we begin to realize what is happening by starting from what we live daily? Why are you not content to live like that? Because, you say, “in my history living like that was never enough for me.” Anything but stopping your search—your history is exactly what prevents you from not searching anymore!

Then two things happened. Due to something that occurred to me, my usual shortcomings came to the surface and the question arose again: am I fine the way I am? The second thing was a conversation with a friend who asked me what I was discovering in my relationship with my boyfriend. These two questions backed me up against the wall, because they found me empty. Not automatically, but after a few hours I decided to read the School of Community and I realized what had happened. Those two annoying questions had restored to me the poverty that was mentioned in the last School of Community. They made me once again look at my desire and admit that there was a disproportion, namely that I was missing something, so much so that I picked up again the text of School of Community. I was very struck by what happened afterwards. I had to see a friend, but I had no intention of being my truest self, nor of asking her what she was discovering, yet, after

what had happened to me I went to see her with greater poverty, with all my need to meet her and to know how she was deepening her knowledge of Jesus.

Only a place like the Christian community can constantly reawaken one's will to begin to move, to take seriously and be open to the questions by which life provokes us. Anything but a place in which everything one lives is flattened, without questions and the desire to search! This is a place that arouses the questions. What other questions have we recognized during this period?

A question that continues to resurface and is setting me in motion concerns the point about the "common good" that Pope Francis mentioned in Cesena: how does the common good relate to my being in school, to my family, to grocery shopping, or to having the flu? Initially those two words resonated with me, but in time they seemed to me more and more abstract. I recognized a greater familiarity with the word "subsidiarity," whose signs I recognize more easily in my experience and which for me identifies better the dynamics of charity. The term "common good" remains ambiguous. Deep down, what I desire for myself is the human experience of Jesus the way in which it is repeated to me in the words of the Mass: "Freely offering Himself." That's it. That is the position I would like to have. Nothing less than that. This impetus of charity that arises in my heart is not mine, it makes me move toward those whom I encounter, and the impulse of good that I feel is first of all for the person in front of me. I cannot understand the common good as a universal value able to generate a dynamic of charity. I think that it conceals some risks. Please help me understand, so that I can live the step that you are asking us to make.

What is this impetus of charity that makes you move toward the other, this impulse of good that you feel, if not the common good? You move for a good that you share with the other. You find within yourself an impetus toward the other and in this experience, you discover how your impetus becomes a good also for the other. Thus, the term "common good" begins to stop being abstract and becomes something concrete, for you and for the other.

With regard to this, when I—who teach Humanities in a classical high school—read the fliers of CL and of the Company of Works [CdO] on the elections, every statement they contained seemed far removed from my experience, because I am not involved in any political activity; actually, I feel rather removed from it. Yet, a question kept resonating within me: How can I not stay on the sidelines? How can I deal with a reality as important as the elections? The fact that the Movement didn't give any indication on how to vote forced me to pay attention to what was happening around me. Thus, it happened that a young man from our town came to our small Fraternity group to tell us about his experience. He is involved in the Neighborhood Council and lives politics as something of primary importance, not secondary. He told us how he always had the well-being of people at heart, starting from the needs he saw, so much so that he shoveled snow when it was necessary, or walked through the streets of his neighborhood to prepare a report on the state of the streetlights that weren't working. Although the party removed his signature from the report and replaced it with its stamp, he was still happy, because the streetlights were repaired, and the peoples' need was answered. Furthermore, he told us how, at a diocesan meeting where they had a panel on politics, he met people from different parties who nevertheless looked at politics in the same way he did, that is, as a service. So, when the meeting ended he sought out one of those people and then others, so much so that now, beginning with them, a group was born of people involved in politics who meet monthly so that they don't have to work alone. In listening to these stories, I told myself that this way of facing things is the same that I live as a teacher in my school. I meet periodically with other teachers for dinner and we discuss the needs that we see in our

school, our relationship with the kids, with our colleagues, and with the principal; we tell each other about what happens to us so that we can compare our views starting from common interests and common needs. When we started we were only a few, but now our numbers have grown progressively, because my need is truly everyone's need. This is my way of acting "politically" — in the original sense of the word—where I live and work.

Indeed! It is your way of being interested in the *polis*. We are the ones who reduced this interest to participating in the elections.

This also gave me clarity on how to vote, because I want to support those young people who deal with life starting from the same premises and same need that moves me. Thank you for the personal work you have brought me to do, which will remain with me even after voting and have given me an ever-growing awareness of my presence in reality.

This is the outcome of the work that we have invited each other to do: in front of something that initially felt distant from your experience, you felt a repercussion and you were unable to remain on the sidelines, like the Pope said. Everything you recounted is born from belonging to a place that sets you in motion in your school, in front of the needs of your students, in the same way it moved that friend of yours involved in politics to look for others who shared the same interest in politics as service. This is not closing oneself up in an individualistic stance. There are some "I's" that from the start begin to generate places and groups where this being in motion continues to happen and starting from a few they begin to become many. What does this belonging to the Christian community awaken in the subject?

Starting from the Pope's appeal to work all together for the common good of our country, I felt the urgent need to tell everyone about the newness in my way of looking at things...

Look! Don't miss this point: "I felt the urgent need": each person has been moved by something, no one has remained blocked.

...that my experience of faith has given to me in recent years. Moved by this need, I couldn't hold back, and I wrote a letter to a daily newspaper. I am reading some passages: "For quite sometime now, there has been a growing belief that the only tool we citizens have to truly contribute to building up the common good is to delegate to the politicians we elect..."

Politics is reduced to delegating to others.

...as if at this level the other expressions of our person like our work, family, free time, etc., were practically totally ineffective and irrelevant facts. However, this is a totally partial judgment. We don't really think that our only contribution to the common good as citizens ends with marking an X on a ballot every five years, do we? With this, I obviously don't want to say that for me the moment in which I cast my vote is not important, but that it represents only a small part of the much wider contribution I can give as a man to the good of my country. In fact, I think that as my contribution to the history of the people to which I belong, much more important and decisive are the intensity and passion for the ideal with which I try to live moment by moment my work, my friendships, my social commitments, my free time, my family, and everything God gives me to live with all the other human beings who are my brothers and sisters." To write this letter, I didn't have to make any effort. I simply followed the desires that arose in my heart in front of the upcoming deadline of the elections, thanks to the experience of faith that I have the grace to participate in.

As we can see, these contributions, one after the other, show that having found what one was seeking doesn't stop the searching, but rather continues to set it in motion. This is very clear. The

experience of faith not only doesn't stop our searching, but it exalts it. This is the first contribution that the Church gives to our life: it offers us the possibility of belonging to a place that constantly arouses our interest, the interest of each one of us for things that we previously thought were abstract with respect to the good of all.

Last Thursday I went to a meeting with a politician and for the first time in my life some questions arose in me about politics and not only...

"Some questions arose in me": everything wasn't clear to her from the beginning.

...and I ask you some of these questions. In a historical moment like ours, when everything seems so fragmented, what does Christian unity consist of? Where do I see it also in political choices? What does it mean to you to be our father? What is the criterion with which I recognize who is a true guide for me? After the Thursday meeting I decided to ask a young man I respect, and who knows more than I do, what he thought about it and also about the questions that had arisen in me. I saw that he was more interested in attacking the politician—by the way, I didn't agree with everything he had said either—in defending a position, and especially I saw that he was biased toward me because I had gone to the meeting without having read the texts, among them that of the Pope, that had been suggested to us. After this conversation I wasn't at peace, because I was struck by the fact that, even if I agreed with most of what he said, I didn't feel looked at as a whole and I felt judged only on the basis of the "scandal" of not having done "what I had to do" to be a good Christian, a diligent CL follower. Right after my meeting with this young man, I met another friend to whom I recounted what he had said to me (without mentioning the reaction it had provoked in me). He simply said, "How beautiful that these questions came up in you, because it isn't something one can take for granted!" I was very struck because instead of focusing on the lack of consistency of my actions, on my being unfaithful to my own questions, this friend looked at me with an awareness of the true need to know that I had, that made me ask. Therefore, the first thing I did when I went back to the library was to read the texts that we had been asked to read, no longer as a moral duty, but as a possibility for me to discover something more that could address my questions. I realize that even among us we can look at each other in a reduced way, wanting to convince each other, or instead we can look at each other starting from the true questions we have—sometimes betrayed even by ourselves, sometimes hidden—and support each other in pursuing them. This latter seems to me the only interesting approach one can have generally and in conversations about politics. How can I engage with someone who doesn't vote for the candidate I vote for, if not for the questions that we all have and about which we can have a true dialogue? Finally, I was involved in another conversation on politics in which many claimed it was necessary to express publicly for whom we should vote, for many reasons that I am not going to repeat here. As I was listening, I who am a wretch and ignorant in political matters to boot, felt the effects within me of something jarring. If I look at the present time and at the journey I took—not alone—to try to understand, and even just at the questions that arose in me about the elections (but also about myself, about how I stand in the world, about how I am with my friends and how I look at them), honestly my greatest desire cannot be that someone imposes from above whom I should vote for. This is not because I am the greatest political expert, not because we don't have to honestly challenge ourselves, not because each person should mind his own business and there isn't a single truth to which we all aspire, but because if this truth doesn't become mine, I cannot live it concretely. A truth that is not mine would be like a stranger in my own home. Without

being urged to move personally, I wouldn't have discovered these things about myself. I wish to make this journey on which you and the Pope invite us, because I want to discover ever more who I am.

“If this truth doesn't become mine, I cannot live it concretely.” After all these contributions, during this period each of us, depending on how he got involved more or less, on how he answered the provocations, the suggestions we have given to ourselves, is making a verification of faith. What is the point of participating in a place like this? What makes it reasonable to be here at this hour of the evening? Only if this is the place in which, because of the fact that we are here, each of us doesn't stop searching, but instead is constantly reawakened to take seriously his own questions, to desire to make a journey that causes us to become ever more protagonists. This is what the truth of the dogma documents, that is, the self-awareness that the Church has acquired with time.

This work doesn't end here. This evening we had an additional confirmation with regard to a totally concrete question—the elections— but also about life in school, about the circumstances of life and the concerns we have, about the human relevance of faith, about how faith is relevant to life's needs and how faith allows us to make a journey that is truly human. Now each of us has a clearer reason for adhering or for deciding to do as he pleases, but we cannot continue to say that the pages of the School of Community that we are studying are abstract, that they have nothing to do with our lives. In fact, we were able to discover how these pages that initially seemed abstract are instead relevant to life. This speaks to the newness that we happened to encounter.

The next School of Community will be held on Wednesday, March 21 at 9:00 pm for those who want to continue the journey. We will continue our work on the text *Why the Church?* We will go over the part titled “The Self-Communication of a Divine Reality” including the section on the sacraments, pp. 179-189.

The Easter Poster describes the reason that moves everything in us.

I am reading Fr. Giussani's phrase that we chose to accompany Burnand's painting depicting the two disciples running to the tomb on the morning of the Resurrection. *“Ever since the day Peter and John ran to the empty tomb and saw Him risen and alive in their midst, everything can change. From then on, and forever, a person can change, can live, can live anew. The presence of Jesus of Nazareth is like the sap that, from within—mysteriously but certainly—refreshes our dryness and makes the impossible possible. What for us is impossible is not impossible for God. So that the slightest hint of a new humanity, to someone who looks with a sincere eye and heart, becomes visible through the company of those who recognize that He is present: God-with-us. The slightest hint of a new humanity, like dry and bitter nature becoming fresh and green once more.”*

The Book of the Month for March is *A Song for Nagasaki: The Story of Takashi Nagai, Scientist, Convert and Survivor of the Atomic Bomb*, by Paul Glynn. It is very interesting to read how the protagonist of the book, a Japanese doctor, encountered faith, and to see how—in the moment of destruction and bewilderment after the atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki—his being a Christian represented a point of reconstruction and a new beginning for Japan.

We thought of this book after seeing the picture taken by an American photographer after the atomic bombing of Nagasaki that the Pope asked to be printed and distributed: a child waits his

turn at the crematorium for his dead little brother whom he is carrying on his shoulders. The image is a caution against what the Pope calls “piecemeal World War III” that ravages the world today. In this regard, I remind you of the Pope’s invitation to a special Day of Prayer and Fasting for Peace on Friday, February 23rd.

At the end of February, a new edition by Rizzoli of Fr. Giussani’s book *Realta` e giovinezza. La sfida* [Reality and Youth: The Challenge] will become available in the bookstores. The book describes some conversations Fr. Giussani had with and about young people. Anticipating a perception that is widespread today, Fr. Giussani realized many years ago that the educational and social context tended to silence the needs of young people for truth, beauty, justice, and happiness. In view of the Synod of Bishops on “Young People, The Faith, and Vocational Discernment” (that will take place in October), this book can be used for public presentations, especially because it relates to a theme that is very present in the conversations going on now in many places within the life of the Church and in society. The new edition is first and foremost an opportunity for us to read or reread the book. It contains many points and suggestions that are totally contemporary and that we can offer as a contribution to all, because now many people are concerned about the issues discussed in it and have questions that have an answer like the one we have encountered.

At this time in Italy and abroad the Holy Masses in remembrance of the anniversary of Fr. Giussani’s death and the recognition of the Fraternity are celebrated. We ask Fr. Giussani to help us be faithful, despite all our limitations, to the path that he laid out for us. We would have a hard time listening to the things we have heard this evening if it weren’t for our belonging to this place, generated by the grace received by Fr. Giussani to which we continue to be faithful.

May the time of Lent that the Church proposes to us be a provocation for discovering what is truly essential for living.

Veni Sancte Spiritus