

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

Reference text: L. Giussani, *Why the Church?* pp. 179-189

- *A new creation*
- *Le stoppie aride [Dry stubble]*

*Glory Be*

*Veni Sancte Spiritus*

Good evening everyone! Let's tackle the second aspect of the self-communication of the divine in the Church. The first aspect, as we saw, concerned "*the truth which the Church communicates to us with definitive clarity and certainty*" (p. 179). Yet, what good would it be to communicate the truth if it weren't possible to live it? Everything would become even more complicated. It isn't enough to know the truth, therefore what we are going to tackle this evening—which is the heart of Christianity—is necessary: "The communication of a divine reality." Pope Benedict XVI expressed it very poignantly when he said that in Christianity the key concepts became flesh and blood, "*Christ [...] gives flesh and blood to those concepts—an unprecedented realism*" (*Deus caritas est*, no. 12). Truth has become flesh, the communication of the divine has become flesh, experience. That is why the heart of Christianity is not just a teaching, some declarations and statements, but the communication of the divine reality. It isn't just a communication of truth, says Fr. Giussani, but of the divine reality itself that otherwise would remain something distant from us. What could we do if we simply "knew" it?

Sometimes we don't realize that the heart of Christianity is this communication of the divine reality that touches the human being and changes him, that doesn't remain outside him, but rather enters the depths of the "I" making it become more itself: "*Man remains man, but becomes something more*" (p. 180). This evening we will try to discover this "*dawning of a different humanity*" (p. 183), to help each other look at life from this perspective. Where have we seen it? Does this dawning truly happen or not? Where have we perceived it? Where have we noticed this "more," this divine which penetrates our bones, the details of our life? We are often very concerned with the first aspect—the communication of truth—and less with the second, the communication of a divine reality, this "more" of humanity generated by Christianity as life. If we realized it, our fundamental concern would be that it could become ours. Fr. Giussani was very aware of this and therefore he said, "*How the force of this announcement—that we have been recreated—has been weakened in our consciousness! How we have depleted the potential of this new self-awareness*" (p. 182), of what we carry in our flesh, in our depths, in everything that we see and touch. That is why we often think that unless we say certain things our contribution is nil, as if what we are weren't enough; it is because we have "*emptied through moralistic usage the concept of 'sanctifying grace'*" (ibid.), the thing that makes the "I" become something more. This evening's contributions follow a path that has the purpose of helping us recognize in experience the signs of the self-communication of the divine reality.

In *Why the Church?* Fr. Giussani says, “Anyone who lives the mystery of the ecclesial community receives a change in his nature” (p. 182).

“He receives, receives!” It isn’t something that he must generate, rather he receives it.

“And we are not called to announce this regeneration only with words. Rather, we are invited to live an experience” (ibid.)

“We are not called to announce it only with words.” Pay attention, because we shouldn’t skip even one line, otherwise we end up thinking that our task is just to announce with words. And instead? “We are invited to live an experience”!

*Giussani says, “In the Christian, the newness is called to awaken and, no matter how dimly, to manifest itself like the dawn of a new day [...] If he were to see, for the first time, the first half-light of day, he would realize that what was unfolding before his eyes was something new. It was no longer darkness” (pp. 182-83). As I read these pages and spoke with some friends, I had the opportunity to rethink about the recent weeks. Some facts happened that reawakened my “I” clearly and powerfully, and together with that many questions arose that I hadn’t asked personally in quite a while. I will recount three facts that happened. First, my examination session ended with an exam that I took with a friend. The oral questions were asked in two parts, in the morning with an assistant and in the afternoon with the professor. Ten other young women were taking the exam with us. One of them was a little different, very strange. She joined us and we began to go over some parts of the exam. We spent the morning before the exam together and I discovered many things about her: she has not yet finished the three-year program because she is unable to sit still in a chair for the exams. We both took the morning portion of the oral exam and she decided to stay with me afterwards. In the afternoon the same thing happened: she remained glued to me and to my friend, while all the other girls were a bit reluctant to stay with her because her insistent questions made them anxious. During the portion of the exam with the professor she panicked and wanted to leave, so I asked the professor if I could answer my question first. During the time it took me to answer she recovered and was able to get a good grade. By the time we left it was 6:00 pm, and she looked at me with astonishment and said, “You really offered to answer your question in my place?!” She didn’t know how to thank me. I proposed to her that we also take the Latin exam together. At the end of the day I was glad. When I told some friends about it, I recognized a fullness and freedom of initiative that had totally conquered me.*

You didn’t speak of “religious” things. It looks as if you didn’t do anything and instead you communicated everything to that young woman!

*Second fact: I spent two days at the beach with some friends. The first evening I felt an overwhelming sense of restlessness. I was pensive and I was judging myself a lot, but all of these feelings dissolved in less than an hour. At dinner we were very free in telling each other about the things that happened to us and the difficulties we faced in the previous weeks, asking each other questions moved by a true interest for the experiences we were living. The two days were lived in a spirit of being free to reveal our personalities, without scandal or unease. It was beautiful to be together, because each of us was wanted there exactly as he or she was. I really felt that we were together to have the opportunity to be surprised at everything, at living reality together. Third fact: last weekend I went abroad with some university friends to visit some CLU friends. These were very intense days. I perceived even more forcefully what it means that we are immersed in a companionship that allows a radical change of our nature to happen, a change that makes it possible to spend days of true friendship with people who on a day-to-day basis live very far from*

*each other. In remembering these facts I am struck by the element of freedom that I consistently felt within me, which is the sign of a new way of looking at things, of being regenerated, that I lived in my experience even before I could explain it in words. They were all opportunities for reconquering the grace of the encounter that happened to me years ago. I am full of gratitude for what is present around me and for what I am living. This was the first discovery. Then some questions arose: What is the nature of this change that sometimes I notice in myself, in my attitude toward myself and things? I see that the dominant note of my days and my relationships is often not this truth, this simplicity, but rather being tired, as if there was an ambiguity in the way I face things or the way I am with my friends. The image of being swept away by the tide describes my experience: when the wave rises I feel full of enthusiasm, but instead when something unexpected happens or perhaps nothing happens, I feel deflated. At the last CLU Diakonia, they used the example of listening to a song “live” or being content with a recording. I would say that it isn’t so much about not being amazed at what happens, but that sometimes this amazement peters out—the enthusiasm I experienced with my friends abroad, the way I looked at the other student during the exam, are particular situations, the impact of which slips through my hands as soon as I return to my daily life. The relationship with the One who has given me everything is becoming more compelling and asks for a true name: the forms I was used to no longer satisfy me completely. I need rest for my heart and I desire to ask ever more for the things and the One who can make that happen. I wonder how I can deepen the newness of which Fr. Giussani speaks in the School of Community text, what it means to challenge all the little things that happen and that you say are decisive.*

What you recounted is a very beautiful documentation of the method. First there is the surprise about what happens. When a person is dominated by anxiety you can accompany her without saying anything, communicating to her a newness just with your presence, so much so that she doesn’t want to leave you. What did she find in you? There is your amazement at the freedom you lived on all your trips and for a different way you could be together with your friends. The first sign that should be recognized is this amazement. The fruit of the Christian event in our lives is the experience of being surprised. You didn’t follow a specific path of training in order to have a certain attitude when you were at the beach, abroad, or in front of the friend you met at the exam. You said that you found in yourself a new freedom and a new perspective on reality. What are these born from? This is what we must discover. Yet, the first thing we must do is to recognize, to acknowledge, something: the person who lives the life of the Church doesn’t communicate only some words, but something he has experienced that he is surprised to find in himself. Yet, after we have these experiences we often forget about the gift of this awareness. Then we begin to feel the urgent need to fully understand, to grasp more deeply, the newness of what has happened, and to unmask an ambiguous way of being in front of things or your friends, which involves being unaware of what is at the origin of that newness. This poses a question we must face together this evening. A friend wrote, “If grace makes us new creatures, creates us anew and changes our nature, why in daily life do we get bogged down in the circumstances? This is a question asked in the first contribution.

*By participating in the communal life of the Church through the gestures the Movement has proposed to me, I rediscovered in myself a new man, as the passage in the School of Community we are working on says. This is a newness that even in front of my father’s death and difficulties*

*at work and in my relationships, has always turned my gaze toward Jesus and has brought me very often to saying “yes” to Him in the most difficult moments.*

Do you understand? Not just before the sunset or in certain particularly ecstatic moments, but also in the tough moments: that is where the difference shows.

*At a certain point, though, in some situations in my life I wanted to continue to live like a new man without taking into account that the newness was given to me and I didn't create it on my own. I ask you this: Where do I end and He begin? When I am acting as a new man I have a desire to do things well, to choose and build well, but very quickly I find myself making mistakes, I find myself asking reality to pay me back for the good things I have done, even if in theory I know I didn't do them by myself. I feel the full disproportion of my pretentiousness. Where is the turning point after which I cooperate with God, when I stop pretending and I become His son to the core?*

What you said at the end is the beginning of the answer. Where does the turning point begin? When do we begin to realize that this newness is no longer entering our life? Each of us expresses it in a different way. The first contribution this evening spoke of “ambiguity”; you speak of “continuing counting only on yourself.” The problem arises because, as you said, one forgets that this new nature was given to him. If one detaches himself from the origin, from the source that gives this gift to him, at a certain point he verifies that he cannot stand on his own. That is why you intuit that the point is how to become more and more a son, to avoid detaching yourself from the origin. Here is a point that is discussed in the School of Community and that can be clarified starting from what you just said. What is the cause of this ambiguity that at a certain point leads one to think that he can continue counting only on himself?

*I have a hard time understanding a point in the School of Community: the difference between an individualistic and a personal relationship. I intuit the answer, but only in theory, not in the flesh. Furthermore, I see in myself the great risk that my relationship with Jesus may become intimistic, a refuge from reality rather than something that spurs me to face it. I wanted to ask you if you could give me some concrete examples.*

The sentence you referred to is, “Thus, while the Christian life cannot ever be conceived as an individualistic relationship with Christ, it is, nevertheless, a highly personal one” (p. 186). Has anyone experienced this? Where?

*I will recount what happened to me after the meeting with the Center of the CLU last week. I had been going through a difficult time, I was full of doubts about Christianity and therefore also about the Movement and my friends. Yet, on that morning, as I listened to you and to those who spoke, it happened again in an unexpected way. I wasn't physically present for the meeting, but I was following you by video connection. As the students gave their contributions I felt growing in me the desire of being able to participate fully, without reservations, in what was happening, and I perceived a rare unity between myself and those around me. I am saying a rare unity because I always experience a deep uneasiness with everyone, an uneasiness that makes me perceive even my friends as distant. In contrast, that day the distance was swept away completely, and I wondered, “What is present here? What happened this morning?” On the evening of the same day some friends came to my apartment to study with me. I hadn't seen some of these friends for a long time and initially I was afraid that we would feel a bit awkward. Yet, what had happened in the*

*morning was so predominant for me that I needed to look for it also with them. Therefore, I found myself telling them what had happened at the meeting of the Center and speaking with one of my friends with a freedom that is not typical of me, and studying more intently. I desire that unity for my life. Afterwards, due to some difficulties that arose with the people in my apartment, this need, this desire for unity became more and more urgent. I spoke about it with a friend who, after listening to me complain about everything that was not working in my life, asked me, "What are you living personally?" as if to say, "What are you looking for in your days?" He offered me a different hypothesis because I had already forgotten that only when I am seeking the Lord can I begin to deal with everything differently. During this month, due to many things that have happened, a desire came back forcefully to me that He may begin to take over my whole life. I was very provoked by reading these pages of the School of Community because most importantly they made me look anew at my friends, at the people who share the apartment with me and at my professors, looking at them as faces through which the presence of Christ can pass. This made me remember that my relationship with Christ is not individualistic, but rather happens through some specific faces and gestures. Yet, when I read that "the Church [...] is the place where Christ continues indefatigably to exist in time" (p. 185), and that "the sacrament is the divine which makes an appeal to our senses through the sign, becoming a presence which reaches out far beyond the limits of the sign itself" (p. 189), and that "the saving power of Christ in the world, [...] his capacity to change the world [...], coincide with the Christian community" (ibid.), I realize that I still feel a distance from all of this, as if this unity weren't completely possible.*

How did you describe individualism? "I had been going through a difficult time, I was full of doubts about Christianity and therefore also about the Movement and my friends." You perceived yourself as basically detached from all of that. Then you experienced something different by participating in the meeting of the Center of the CLU—"As I listened to you and to those who spoke, it happened again in an unexpected way." What happened? "As the students gave their contributions I felt growing in me the desire of being able to participate," that is, of binding yourself to something that was happening in them, and "the distance was swept away." Here we see how one passes from individualism to making the relationship with another personal. You wondered, "What is present here? What happened?" Sometimes this passage is so subtle that we don't realize what happened. If you had not participated in that gesture, you would still be distant, detached, that is, isolated. On the contrary, by participating in a place where things happen so powerfully that they attract you, they engage you, they draw you to the point that generates you, you begin to look for Him, there arises in you "a strong desire for the Lord," that is, the One for whom you are made. Then, you begin to perceive what the person is: not the isolated individual, but the "I" as relationship with Another, with Him with a capital H. As a consequence, you begin to look at your friends, at the people who share the apartment with you, at your professors, as "faces through which the presence of Christ can pass." This is how you can begin to break away from an individualistic relationship and make it something personal, discovering that a relationship with Christ is not individualistic and that the Church is the place where Christ continues to be present, arriving at an understanding that the sacrament is the gesture in which the divine makes Himself perceivable to our senses through a sign. Later we will tackle the point about our distance from all of this, but now the point is to begin to see how the fact of the Church, the fact of the Christian community, pulls us out of individualism, attracting us to a place in which we desire to participate, which is what Jesus himself began to do first: by attracting those who were His own

into a relationship with Him, He began to make the person emerge. In fact, without Him the person wouldn't exist, there would only be the isolated individual. So, what do we need to overcome completely the ambiguity or the attempt of continuing on counting only on ourselves? We need to understand the nature of the two kinds of relationship. What is the difference between an individualistic and a personal relationship? It is exactly "*the attitude of an individual who either confronts things from the limited perspective of his isolated "I" [like you did before you participated in the meeting of the Center of the CLU: an isolated "I"] or perceives himself as the subject of [...] relationships [involved in a relationship] because his essence [your essence as subject] is relationship with the Infinite*" (p. 186), which is the true concept of person.

*The past two weeks were a bit tough for me. It was one of those periods in which you have a ton of things to do, obviously all at the same time, and you cannot stop, always focused on running after things. I was leaving home early in the morning and coming back late in the evening, going between work, studying, group meetings, singing at Masses (requested at the last moment), and appointments at my boarding school. In short, quite a frenzy. I had begun to do things mechanically; in particular I noticed—only afterwards, though—that I had lost a bit the sense of why it is worthwhile to do everything, to spend yourself like that. I realized this because in a matter of days there were three deaths that turned me upside down. First a university student friend of one of my friends died of cancer in a very short time. Then a young woman in another department was killed by a shot from her boyfriend's gun (fired by mistake, apparently). Finally, there was the sudden death in his sleep of a soccer player on the team from Florence (this struck me deeply, because I am a soccer fan and a professional soccer player is one of the most medically screened people in the universe). In front of all of this I couldn't help but wonder, "Why do I do all the things I do if I may not wake up the next morning or in two minutes I may no longer be alive?" I realized that lately I have gotten used to doing things because the people I do them with are my friends, and by being with them I think that I am fine. I was very hurt by the realization that not even my friends are enough for me.*

Pay attention! We may be involved in many relationships, but when life becomes pressing they are not enough. So? What pulls us out of that isolated way of perceiving ourselves?

*Exactly because I realized that my friends were not enough for me, definitely not enough, I noticed that I need something that is much more infinite, and—thank God—I can say that I met this something in my life, but I need to see Him again. In these recent days it was dramatic, but also liberating, to live every instant with the request, "Lord, let me recognize You more and more in what You give me to do, in the encounters and situations I live." It is really beautiful to realize that little by little, more and more, I begin again to see that there are so many gifts in my day that the Lord gives me, and that the only thing I truly need is to realize that he is always present and loves me with infinite love.*

What pulls us out of individualism is this recognition that passes through everything the Mystery gives us: reality, friends, the Christian community. Without this relationship, whose essence—as Fr. Giussani says—is relationship with the Infinite, loneliness could not be overcome, and not even individualism. That is why you begin to truly realize what is crucial and then you ask, "Lord, let me recognize You more and more in what You give me to do, in the encounters and situations I live," that is, that everything I do may live in relationship with the Infinite who comes to me through the sign. This is the "change" that little by little takes place in our lives.

*The School of Community from this recent period questioned me in a particular way. I will quote a passage, “Within the man to whom Christ draws near and who freely desires and accepts the relationship with Him—and therefore within the Church—his nature as a man changes. This is an ontological ‘exaltation’ of the ‘I’” (p. 180). In reading that I immediately wondered: what is this “change”? What are its characteristics? Upon hearing the word “change” a measurement is immediately triggered in me. I’ll give you an example. My personality is insecure and indecisive, but in the past few months has become less noticeable, so much so that I thought: at last I am growing, look how much I have changed, I am more decisive! Instead, in the recent period I feel worse than before. My boyfriend and I have decided to get married and there are many important decisions to be made, and with regard to practical matters I change my mind a thousand times. In reading the School of Community I thought: where is this change, if instead of improving I get worse? Then something happened. After a day in which I had driven my boyfriend quite crazy—even justifiably so—by changing my mind continually, when saying good-bye he asked me, “When do we see each other again?” He wanted to see me again! How is it possible? For me it was something inexplicable because I couldn’t stand myself any longer. In thinking about the School of Community again, I understood that maybe I had intuited something more: the change that Christ brought to my life is not an improvement of my person, a greater perfection or self-sufficiency. When I think of change this way I feel bad and I can’t breathe, because I think that everything is my responsibility. Instead, the change that Christ brought to my life is the very fact of His presence. What changes me is the awareness that I am wanted the way I am, an awareness that often fades, but that is reborn in facts and in the experiences I have. This recognition of being wanted changes me because it fills me with amazement about the fact that I exist, about the fact that everything exists, making me curious and not closed in, focusing on my limitations.*

This is the change. If instead I measure the change only in terms of an improvement I can obtain on my own, I suffocate, because I am operating within an individualistic horizon. Everyone can reason like that. The sign that that is not the newness Christ introduces in life is that I can’t breathe. As soon as we move away from the origin—we can do the test—the red lights turn on: we cannot breathe. Paradoxically, this makes us understand even more the nature of the newness introduced by Christ. What newness? A change in my perception of myself, in my self-awareness: “It is the awareness that I am wanted,” that I am in relationship with Another. The concept of person changes. Yet, this cannot happen if one—as the text you read says—doesn’t freely accept a relationship with Him. It doesn’t happen automatically: you must accept what you have recognized. The relationship that Jesus established with you in Baptism, the fact that you are His, is the very powerful gesture of Christ who says to you, “Friend, I love you and all of your evil, all of your problems, your personality, your changes; these cannot affect what you are, nor the gesture of preference that I make toward you in Baptism.” Understanding this, as you said, changes the perception you have of yourself: “What changes me is the awareness that I am wanted.” It isn’t yet the midday sun, but it is the newness of the dawning of a new day. “*The comparison I like to make is in fact the dawn*” (pp. 182-83). Everything is no longer darkness like before, but rather something different begins to appear, something that still must develop in its entirety. We haven’t already reached the goal. Anything but a halt to the searching! On the contrary, this is what sets it in motion. This is the role of the Church in society: a place, the Christian community, that is “*the*

dawning of a different humanity, of a different human community, a community that is, new, truer” (p. 183). To pass from the dawn to midday is a personal journey that each of us must make.

*I am reading from p. 180 in Why the Church? “Man is the same man, but he is different.” The new birth of which Jesus speaks to Nicodemus is the birth of a new creature. For sometime now I have noticed that I have changed: what scandalized or blocked me before, my ideas, are shattered before the evidence of this You, in front of the present presence of Christ, here and now.*

This is the newness: all your ideas have been overtaken by this Presence, by the evidence of a You, so that we enter a new realm.

*This happened as a step in some work I have been doing. I have been in the Movement for more than 20 years and I have often understood the community to be a source of mortification for myself, because often I haven’t understood things and I was strongly against the authorities in the Movement, against the leader and the directives we were given. The word “directive” seemed to me like an imposition, a rule. I was convinced that things could be done better according to my own ideas. It isn’t that I didn’t follow, but it is as if in following the Movement my skepticism only grew because, in the end, the temptation was not to accept the shortcomings of other people. This resulted in discussions with long-time friends in the Movement and then in my distancing myself and closing up. In fact, over time this untenable position wears you down. What made me change? The fact that I hit rock bottom. This also coincided with my father’s sudden death. The first evidence was that I began to be uncomfortable with my long-time friends. It was absurd, because if up to that point they had been my dearest friends, it meant that something was wrong with me. Moreover, I was no longer interested in the proposals of the Movement; I had begun to complain about everything and I was no longer looking at anyone. As things progressed I felt worse and worse; I couldn’t breathe. I didn’t accept the limitations of others and therefore didn’t accept my own. Here is the turning point: what a grace to read your interview—the one that scandalized many people and is now permanently on my nightstand so that I can read it in every moment—entitled “Others Do Not Create Problems for Us; Others Make Us Aware of the Problems We Have” (Jot Down, January 21, 2017). In my small way I have realized that I was like the Unnamed of Manzoni, and I surrendered, finding myself on my knees before the Lord, offering my nothingness. I began to be reborn, starting from the words in the first chapter of The Religious Sense: “Much observation and little discussion is conducive to truth” (p. 3). I began again to do the School of Community seriously, and on each occasion I made some discoveries that became events, facts that witness to the presence of Christ. My long-time friends in the Movement are my friends more than ever. Through them I discovered that authority is the factor that makes us grow; it is what makes us express more who we are, rather than being an impediment. In short, I am free. Now if the community does something I don’t understand, it isn’t a problem for me; actually it is a provocation to better understand the journey we must make together. The Event that happens is something that is always new and is therefore exciting rather than limiting, because it is something ‘other’ than myself. It is the possibility of knowing more the Mystery who is among us. What changed me? Faithfulness to the companionship of Christ. Fr. Giussani says, “Anyone who lives the mystery of the ecclesial community receives a change in his nature. We cannot understand how this happens, how it is that our person changes; yet if we take this phenomenon into consideration, if we live it, if we assume a commitment to it, then we will become different in a verifiable way” (p. 182). I conclude with a phrase of yours that you said at a meeting with the leaders of the*

*singing, “What can we do for others so that they can be excited by the Christian experience? It is called ‘witness.’ There is no other method.”*

Because it is through a witness that what happened to us is communicated! The concepts have become flesh. It is by virtue of an experience that may go through all the meanderings of life—like you recounted to us with simplicity, without being scandalized by it—that you understood. Fr. Giussani says, “*We cannot understand how this happens, how it is that our person changes; yet if we take this phenomenon [following] into consideration, if we live it, if we assume a commitment to it, then we will become different in a verifiable way*” (ibid.), both toward ourselves and others. It isn’t an individualistic, but a personal journey, a journey from which one can distance himself, to the point of hitting bottom, like the Prodigal Son, up to the point of becoming skeptical. To be reborn after one has hit the bottom is different—the Mystery may allow you to reach that point, since you are hard-headed, but it is precisely there where you can see the victory over your attempt to distance yourself from the origin, over your going it alone, over ambiguity. Then you become a witness and nothing frightens you anymore, even if you hit bottom again. You found a foundation for your life that is infinitely more powerful than anything else. How does the Church educate us to recognize God’s method so that we no longer live with ambiguity, nor count only on our own strength, and so that we don’t fall into the temptation of intimism? In a document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, published recently to explain what Pope Francis means when he speaks of Gnosticism and Pelagianism, we read, “*Both the individualistic and the merely interior visions of salvation contradict the sacramental economy through which God willed to save the human person*” (*Placuit Deo*, V, 13). That is why the sacraments are the instruments through which we have been pulled out of individualism and intimism. We often perceive gestures like Baptism or Confession or Confirmation to be a bit difficult, until one needs to be forgiven, and then going to Confession starts to become urgent, or until when one needs something truly necessary for life and then goes to receive the Eucharist like a beggar. Thus, we begin to realize that the Church responds to the distance that is constantly created between us and Him by giving us the sacraments, to help us recover from certain situations in which we find ourselves living. Any circumstance can become for us an opportunity to discover this.

*I want to thank you for not having stopped until the last minute to recall us to the work on the political Italian elections on March 4<sup>th</sup>. I have to say that your constant recalling of us to this has proved to be for my own good. You should know that I am one of those who don’t understand much about politics.*

The recalling was precisely for you! Precisely for those who don’t understand much about politics. *I always thought that politics didn’t have anything to do with daily life, that politicians only pursue their own interests, etc. Then something happened: recently my daughter, who started college in another town, came back home very discouraged because she realized that the choice she had made about what to study didn’t correspond to what she really wanted. From this point, little by little, a need of mine exploded, something I have felt before but that I have always tried to manage, to keep in check. The need I am speaking of is the need to feel unified within, to live life in a unified way, that is, to have a single way of looking at everything, of having a criterion that can be valid for everything. How can I support my daughter’s toil? How can I look at her? I shared my distress with some friends and one of them told me, “It is enough that when you look at your daughter you are certain that there is a good for her because there is a good for you.” When we had the last*

*video connection with your School of Community, I truly felt called personally and I told myself, "If I have this need for unity for myself, how can I not look at the political issue?"*

Do you see how we are getting to the root of things? A relationship with a daughter is similar to that with politics; otherwise there is no longer a unified "I."

*I thought that if I desire to live a unified life I can no longer exclude anything, and therefore not even the elections. I went home and the next morning I began to seriously read the texts that were given to us. I am struck by the fact that from the moment in which I tried to look at the elections with the same gaze I have toward my daughter, a world opened up to me. I became curious, even about political platforms. This need for unity for myself brought me further than all of my efforts, so much so that in front of the result of the election I told myself, "Has the complaint, the distrust, won, or can hope still win?" "But do we have something to hope for?" a friend texted me. In answering him some things became clearer to me. First: the importance that the work you asked us to do had for me, because it allowed me to stop suppressing the need I have in my heart. Second: it became clear that I have a hope, because I have encountered it; it is called Jesus Christ and I met this hope in the charism of the Movement. This is not enough, though, because often the complaint prevails in me as well, and this hope that I have in Christ must happen again. Little by little the example of the inmate came into my mind, because, even if I had not encountered the Movement, I might still have had the need to live in a unified way, since this need is innate in me, but I would have looked at it differently.*

Everything is connected, because the position of the person is one: this position involves our relationship with our daughters and our relationship to politics. It involves our relationship with everything. By realizing what the true challenge is, in facing the result of the elections, this question arose from your depths—since you saw how complaint and distrust and anger and bewilderment prevailed—can hope still win? As you can see, this is no longer a problem of which side you are on—we are already beyond that. The problem is whether there is still a hope that can be communicated which in turn can help us look correctly at how things are. This makes us understand what our task is. Why are we in the world? What is our purpose? These are good questions that each of us should take a good look at, and specifically in front of the election results.

The next School of Community will be held on Wednesday, May 23 at 9:00 pm.

We will continue the work on the text *Why the Church?* pp. 189-200 until the text of the Fraternity Exercises becomes available. We will complete the section on the sacraments, going over the points entitled "In Free Personal Participation," "The Answer to an Objection," and "The Sacrament as Prayer." Let's do this work seriously to introduce ourselves to living the sacraments in the truest way possible. This is part of the education provided by the Church to help us understand the meaning of these gestures, so simple yet so decisive for grasping the whole meaning of what we live; otherwise, we don't reach the key point of the Mystery. At the May School of Community we will work on these points and on the Introduction to the Fraternity Exercises.

Fraternity Spiritual Exercises. I remind you that this gesture begins with the Friday evening dinner. To arrive on time, I ask you to consider an appropriate departing time, keeping in mind that the traffic for the May 1<sup>st</sup> holiday weekend will make it more complicated to arrive on time for dinner and the Introduction. The gesture of the Exercises consists of silence, singing, prayer, and attention

to the other person. Therefore, let us prepare ourselves, for one weekend of the year, to live the gesture in its totality so that it may have an penetrating effect on our lives.

The Pope's Meeting With Italian Youth. On August 11-12 the Holy Father will meet the Italian youth in Rome, in preparation for the Synod of Bishops that will take place in October. The Movement adheres to the Pope's invitation through various ways of participating. First, exclusively for students graduating from high school and college and for those who recently finished college, is a pilgrimage that will take place starting on Wednesday, August 8 in Rome and nearby areas and concluding with participation in in the Vigil with the Pope himself near the Circus Maximus on Saturday at 11:00 pm and in the Mass in Saint Peter's Square on Sunday August 12. All the other youths—middle and high school students, university students, and sixteen to thirty years old young workers—are invited to the Saturday Vigil and to the Holy Mass on Sunday. Another way of participating in the meeting with the Pope will be to join the pilgrimages proposed by the bishop of your diocese.

Next week, as we all know, is Holy Week. May it find all of us full of desire and ready to put ourselves with our entire life and all of our difficulties and questions before what the Church proposes to us in the Easter liturgy. Let us identify ourselves with the mystery of Christ's love, which nothing can stop, up to the total offer of His life for us, so that we may see Him Risen, and thus have our life filled with hope.

Happy Easter everyone!

*Veni Sancte Spiritus*