

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

Reference text: L. Giussani, *Why the Church?* McGill-Queens University Press 2001, pp. 203–09

- *Alecrim*
- *Negra Sombra*

Glory Be

We face a fundamental chapter, as a method not only for today, but to always keep in mind as part of the whole journey. Basically, this chapter is a summary of the journey we have made so far, which Fr. Giussani repropose to us in all its steps. We started this journey from *The Religious Sense* in which, from the first chapter, Fr. Giussani gave to us the instrument to make the journey, the criterion for judging everything: the elementary experience, the heart. It is the criterion by which we can compare everything we encounter on the road, whatever it may be, even if it is unexpected, just as the Christian experience is unpredictable and unexpected. So we went on to ask ourselves: what is the claim of Christianity? That in Christ the divine entered history. This is the content of the second volume of the *PerCorso* [The Path], *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, and the criterion of elementary experience is given to us so that we can intercept Him. Nothing is more important than checking whether this news is true, and therefore whether we can intercept it with that detector by which we were launched into making a comparison with everything that happens. Yet, how can I who was born many centuries later reach certainty about Christ? Only if I can have an experience similar to the one His contemporaries had. That is why it is necessary that Christ be present as He was present to them through His presence here and now in today's Church. This is the object of the third volume of the *PerCorso* on which we are working, *Why the Church?* Near the beginning of the chapter Fr. Giussani asked himself, "Is the Church truly the prolongation of Christ in time and space?" (p. 204).

We have asked ourselves to verify the path we have traveled so far. To accompany us in this verification we are guided by a text, with which we are invited to constantly compare ourselves, so as not to get lost along the road. Yet, questions have already emerged from this comparison.

At the invitation of a friend I reread what you said at the end of Beginning Day on the work of School of Community. What does Fr. Giussani mean when he says, "The work of School of Community should be made in a serious comparison with the text, not following the line of one's own concerns (or one's own reactions to the text)?" I ask this because I feel some lack of understanding: how can I enter the words of a text without being accompanied by the concern or the question that I am living at the time I make the comparison? I wouldn't be myself. I tried to make the comparison, but I feel I am not the only one who didn't understand the depth of what Fr. Giussani is highlighting. Since it is a question of method, it seemed important to ask this question, and ask you what it means to do School of Community.

It is an important point because we often don't compare ourselves with the content of the text, but rather with our thoughts, our images, our concerns. Then, the text often becomes a pretext for us to engage in our own reflections. Years ago, right here, a person intervened at School of Community saying (she remembers it very well!) that, despite multiple attempts, she had not been

able to help a person who was having some difficulties. She also talked about how she had read the School of Community text on hope: “But I lost hope,” she told me. I replied, “You didn’t do a single minute of School of Community!” Why? Because the text said that hope is not based on our attempts, but on our recognition of Christ, that is, on faith. He is our hope. Instead she, with all her good will, worried about a problem she could not solve—so great was her desire to help that person—and put hope in her own attempts (even if they were well-intentioned). Her concerns had prevailed over a comparison with the text. In fact, the text said the opposite. So, if we don’t compare ourselves with the text, then we are at the mercy of our attempts or our concerns, instead of letting ourselves be guided by what happens, by someone, so as not to waste time and not to get caught up in the tangle of our worries. Therefore what Fr. Giussani highlights is crucial. That is why it is important to go back often to the content of the proposal, to reread it—even if these are things we have already read so many times in our lives—to see if we are verifying what the text says, or if we are only following our own concerns. This is the only way to make a journey, and it demands the “tenacity of a journey” (as Fr. Giussani used to say). Otherwise, it is as if one were going to a math class, but instead of paying attention to the content of the explanation remained closed in his worries thinking, “Eh, I certainly cannot abandon my worries to listen!” But if you cannot get away from your thoughts for a moment to follow what is happening in front of you, you will not make a journey—as any teacher knows well. The first suggestion that Fr. Giussani offers us, as a father, is to tell us that the place (locus) of verification is human experience, as the first paragraph of the chapter states. To this end, the first point is to understand what experience is, because it is definitely not something to be taken for granted.

It’s true. During this period, working in parallel on Why the Church? and The Religious Sense, the crucial importance of experience as the fundamental and unavoidable place of verification of reason and faith became clear to me, as you have been trying to make us understand in the School of Community for quite some time. At the same time, however, I happened to observe that one can appeal to experience to support one’s own hypothesis, one’s own idea, so as to impose it on others, with—we might say—an ideological use of experience itself. What made me suspect this was seeing the Spanish film The Motive. In it a man whose work and family life have failed enrolls in a writing school and his teacher invites him to observe, to experience, to live fully, because only this will give him the right inspiration for his novel. The protagonist begins a curious, careful, and systematic observation of life in his apartment building and his novel begins to take shape. But soon, dominated by the anxiety to build the text of his novel, his “world” begins to influence the actual events of his life with subterfuge and lies in order to make the lives of his neighbors go as he wishes the lives of his characters would. The outcome is disastrous: he entices a young couple to commit murder and ends up in jail, and so on. Even if it doesn’t reach such tragic results, I have noticed that something like this often happens also around me and in me. In some dialogues and conversations with adults, at work, or in some problematic situations that I myself had to face, I realized that often one’s experience is made absolute and becomes the only proof of the truth of an idea, of a prejudice that he has about a certain issue or a certain person. Then experience is no longer the place of verification of faith and reason, but rather an argument for or against a preestablished idea. So my question is: under what conditions is experience a source of knowledge, a source of openness, a field of verification, and not a reason for closing the mind and the heart? How can we look at our own experience, with what questions should we question it so as not to

manipulate it and fall into the trap of ideology, from which Fr. Giussani's and your continuous appeal to experience want to save us?

The whole chapter is really an encouragement not to cheat, addressed to the two protagonists involved: man and the Church. “In continuing what Jesus did in his earthly life, the Church addresses our humanity as it is” (p. 204), and “not the masks of humanity which dominate the various forms of society” (p. 205) in which we live. Therefore the first condition for being saved is this encounter that must happen through what I see and that involves my humanity with the life of the Church. In fact, when we let ourselves be struck by the presence of the Church, as the School of Community says, we will be provoked in the deepest folds of our heart closest to our origin. Recently, I went to present a book in Madrid. In front of the testimony of the author who had been bowled over by an encounter with the life of the Church, one of the speakers described what happened when he had read the book: “At my age, I thought I had acquired the right to a certain comfort zone, to a certain peacefulness, and suddenly this testimony appears that turns me upside down.” If one puts himself before the Church with his own humanity, he cannot—as we have always said, citing John and Andrew—not be provoked (like that person who was only waiting for the definitive decline of his life) in the most original movements of his heart. On the other hand, says Fr. Giussani, in order to verify what the heart has come across, man must not stop at the first reaction, but rather must commit himself with his life to “ascertain” this challenge. It is at this point that we often begin to cheat. Your description of the film make us understand that, dominated by anxiety (and therefore not by his humanity as it is originally), this man begins to influence events with subterfuge and lies. We know when we are cheating! It doesn't happen unknowingly. We know that when we don't have a poverty of spirit we select the facts that seem to us to be consistent with what we already have in mind, therefore making impossible a true comparison of our humanity with the proposal of the Church. It is interesting that you have offered this example of the film, because it shows us that the method that is proposed to us serves us in everything, not only to verify the truth of Jesus or the Church, but also to look at reality as it is. In fact, if I leave out all the aspects of reality that in my opinion don't make sense, then I am not applying the conditions for knowing, because I am selecting only a part of reality. That is why it amazed me so much that when one follows what Fr. Giussani says— “If the Church cannot cheat, then neither can man” (p. 208)—experience doesn't deceive us. I often refer to the example that struck me of the young Catalan woman, who was born and raised in an environment of strong nationalism; in meeting the Christian experience and having been moved in the deepest folds of her “I,” she was able to unmask the ideology of those who expected everything from politics. This is the opposite of raising an aspect of something to the level of an absolute; actually, it is precisely what enables us to disassemble preconceived ideas, our own and those of others. Yet, to do this one must be moral, that is, available—as we have said so many times, quoting Jean Guittou—to “submit reason to experience.” Yet, we often realize that we instead want to submit reality to what we have already decided from the start. That is why the path of verification, Fr. Giussani says, must be “faced with an open, willing spirit” (p. 209). Do you see? If we don't go back to the text time after time to verify the path we are taking, or if we don't compare again with the text the questions that emerge along the way, at a certain moment we lose ourselves. Only if we make this journey of verification can we face the question of the person who wrote me about how she lives in a very challenging context (as indeed we all do now) due to the growing violence that is present in all of her relationships; in the family, at work, during her free time, “people increasingly lose their humanity,

leaving room to all the instincts that seem to protect their interests.” And this, she writes, “not only saddens me, but paralyzes me [it blocks her]. Furthermore, my milder and less violent position [as we encourage us to be] seems to be losing before the facts of reality. I have no doubt about my experience, but I wonder: how can I live in this situation, in this jungle? What steps should I take to avoid living these circumstances paralyzed, shocked?” In the face of such a question, we can truly verify whether we are on a journey. In fact, if the Christian proposal doesn’t help us live in this situation, it would only be a cause of trouble. By facing this urgency our friend reminded us of what we heard at Beginning Day, “We must [...] close one phase and begin another: [...] a mature one,” that is to say, “a radical shift in our awareness” must take place (*Alive Means Present!* Supplement to *Traces*, n.9 / 2018, p. 12). That is why Fr. Giussani asks himself, “How can this happen in me? How can this poverty of spirit or this becoming mature gradually become mine?” The first thing to say is that we can face these situations because of the novelty that Christianity has introduced, and before Christianity the revelation of the Old Testament: first Abraham and then John and Andrew and then Paul had the experience of intercepting something that freed them, unlocked them from the situation in which they lived. Why? Because—says the School of Community—we are called as they were, with what has happened to us, to enter into a universal comparison with everything that happens. “The challenge the Church launches can be summarized in this way: it bets on man, so to speak, hypothesizes that the message which it brings will be sifted by man’s elementary experience and will reveal the wondrous presence” (p. 204). By accepting the newness that had entered their lives, Abraham, John and Andrew, and Paul began to live situations similar to ours with a difference within them, that is, they faced everything without being paralyzed by circumstances. Let’s think of someone like Saint Paul, to whom nothing was spared: suffering of all kinds, difficulties, attacks, all sort of things. Yet, he—who had faced all those circumstances, much more terrible than what each of us must face—writes, “What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? [...] No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am convinced [I have come to the persuasion] that neither death, nor life, [...] nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, [...] nor height, nor depth, [...] will be able to separate us from the love of Christ” (Rom 8:35–39). To me these don’t seem the words of a man blocked by the Roman Empire, or by the situations in which he had to live. When one accepts and lets himself be involved in what happens, what happens to him in his life, he acquires this awareness.

In reading Why the Church? I was struck by this question (which doesn’t happen to me often): Where can we find the correspondence of the Christian proposal to the needs of life? A very simple fact came to my mind. The same day I was reading this passage I felt overwhelmed by a lot of things to do, deadlines coming up, jobs to be completed. All this had caused my heart to feel very heavy, not so much because of the deadlines per se, but rather because I couldn’t accept that my whole self could be played out in these few things. On that particularly tiring day I felt the need to go to Mass, not so much for the “placebo effect,” to calm down a bit, but so that even a slightly wider glimpse on myself and my life could be opened, so that my life wouldn’t be reduced to staying all huddled up on what needed to be done. At the homily the priest, commenting on the Gospel, said, “The problem is not the things we need to do, which are often a way of hiding, but love, which is what we will be judged by.” This suited me perfectly, also because it took me less than a

second to understand that there was something infinitely more correspondent to my heart that only Christ brings (at least this is what I have seen). I wanted to ask a question about this: not Christianity as a set of true and just things, but this love that I feel for me is often a tension toward the Mystery, toward fulfillment, toward happiness, which only at certain points or at certain times or concerning some people reveals itself and fills my heart. The rest of the time—when I am not distracted and I realize it, which is not a small thing—there is only desire, which cannot be fulfilled even by doing the “right” things of CL or seeing some special friends. How, then, can one always experience a correspondence, a true fullness? I would like to add something very brief. We had a School of Community exactly on this point and at the end an assembly this summer came up, in which a priest friend of yours, speaking about his journey, said, “Shortly before being ordained a priest, I realized that my life was full of facts in which there was the seal of God, facts that had brought me up to that point, but when I had to say “You,” when I had to get down on my knees and give thanks there was a great resistance in me.” It seems that the same thing happens to me. He continued by telling you, “I want to make a human journey on this fact.” This interests me a lot, because I’m interested in making a human journey.

Do you remember a few moments when you had the experience of this correspondence? When you listened to the priest, why were you struck by what he said? What did it suggest to you? If something hadn’t happened, with all the things you hear from so many priests, you wouldn’t have remembered it. Why was that priest striking to you?

Because he indicated a truer perspective on my life.

Because instead of worrying about the things you needed to do, you allowed a loving gaze to rest on you: “What we will be judged by,” as you said. This made you change more than just your worries about what to do. You didn’t have to cancel anything in your life; it was enough for you to simply accept this love, which began to introduce a difference in the present. Has anyone been able to prevent you from letting that happen?

No.

Could someone have spared you this experience?

No.

This “accepting” is within the reach of each of us after an encounter like the one that happened to you with that priest. So, when you are suffocating, go to Mass if you can, and if you cannot go to Mass, stop for a moment to recognize this look of love on you, let this gaze on you enter and see if this doesn’t give you what you are looking for. In this regard, it always strikes me to reread this judgment by Fr. Giussani: “Only a faith arising from life experience and confirmed by it (and therefore relevant to life’s needs) could be sufficiently strong to survive in a world where everything pointed in the opposite direction” (*The Risk of Education*, The Crossroads Publishing Company, New York, 1995, p. 11). Faith is an experience so present that I can see its confirmation and grasp its correspondence to my heart in my own experience; otherwise I wouldn’t be able to resist in a world where everything says the opposite. So, how can I experience the truth of the claim of Christ and of the Church? Only by letting Him constantly enter my life. We met Him. We are here only because after meeting Him we welcomed Him. This gives us the method of verification in every moment. That is why that brief phrase strikes me: faith is a present experience, and I have the confirmation of this in the very experience of the truth of what I live, because it responds to my need, to my urgent needs in this moment when I am suffocating. Otherwise no one will be able to resist in a world where everything says the opposite of the Christian faith. Yet, this

experience doesn't happen once and for all. As you were able to experience that day at Mass, you can experience it over and over again, but always realizing that what you experience is not total fullness, attained once and for all. "That fullness," says the School of Community—we must always return to the text!—"is just the dawning of the totality. The totality is immeasurably more than we can possibly imagine: it is the 'hundredfold.' But this hundredfold is the sign that the totality is approaching. It is a hidden sign which makes totality manifest. However, unless he lives this experience, man will never be convinced" (p. 209). All this is at hand, but we need the tenacity of a journey to which we are constantly invited. Now, do you understand why it is important to grasp well what is the object of verification in this School of Community? It is not our worries, all the things we have to do, our ideas, but the One we happened to meet, Christ.

The object of my verification today is the fidelity of Christ to my life. Lately I have seen that every day I get up in the morning either tired or excited about going to my internship, but regardless of my mood, I wonder why I am going. The internship is with an important company and according to many I am fortunate to be able to work there. It is the same question that accompanies me even when I go out for a beer with some special friends or when I start to clean and tidy up my house. I wonder: what is the meaning of all of this? Christ came to meet me through my story and claimed to be the answer to this question. "I am the answer to the meaning of everything": I have lived that in a thousand circumstances in these years in CLU. Today what is necessary is a continuous verification of whether Christ is the answer to my going to work, to picking up a piece of paper from the ground, or to the pain I am experiencing because of the death of my grandfather. Every day I live with this question, which is perhaps a hope and a challenge: "Jesus, show me how you are victorious today!" And how does he win? By happening! It is seeing Him reappear in me and in front of me that gives me the certainty to be able to say these words. The event is what now, in His happening again and in my awareness of it, adds an extra brick toward building my certainty. Because if it didn't happen today, if Jesus wasn't able to make me live my daily life more intensely, I wouldn't waste my time praying or being in the movement! And with that "intensely," I mean a life that I wouldn't have previously imagined in terms of potency, depth, and amazement in the face of the great mystery that I am discovering to be my life. So, not only when I am surprised by my new way of looking at my coworkers and their opening up and changing thanks to their interaction with me, but also when I am thrown into suffering (which is not taken away from me), I discover that I am happy and sing to thank Him, even after crying in front of my grandfather's body. This is the verification I have been doing in these months: to bet that within His companionship life offers the hundredfold, and that this is possible everywhere, since I, irrevocably affected by Him because He happened to me, am a potential walking event. The craziest thing is that this happens inside the banality of daily life. I'm interested in living things every day like I've been living them in this period. Just like you live! Now I understand why you are always curious about the last person who went by, and why Fr. Giussani used to tell us that the only thing in which we should imitate him is in his desire to learn!

Thank you.

Until less than a year ago, Communion and Liberation did not really suit me, on the contrary ... I'm already used to this, don't worry!

... I was the first who, as soon as the opportunity presented itself attacked the movement on all fronts. I had something to say about each person. At the end of June, however, some people I didn't know, or rather, that I only knew by sight, invited me to study with them for a rather difficult exam. I knew that most of these people were in CL, so I was looking forward to the moment when they would invite me to the School of Community so that I could clear things up immediately, before they became insistent. It didn't go like that. No one invited me anywhere, no one invited me to their gestures, no one demanded anything from me. After a month of intense studying with these people, I couldn't hide the fact that I couldn't stop smiling when I was with them. In October classes began again and I started to fear that I wouldn't be able to see that group of guys again who had fascinated me so much. As if they had read my mind, they invited me to have lunch, and I couldn't help saying to one of them, "Wow, the way in which you stay together is so nice!" From that moment something was born on which I still depend and on which I already depended. I started saying "yes" to many gestures that—I swear—I would have never thought of doing, like School of Community, charitable work, and Beginning Day; nor would I have imagined speaking here with you now, at this moment. However, I don't say "yes" because now I'm in it up to my neck and I feel compelled and that's okay, but rather because every time I say 'yes' to a proposal of this importance—that is, Christ—I end up smiling more and more and I am always happier; I would be stupid to deprive myself of the opportunity. To conclude, I realized that before I lived inside my own mind-set and I was substituting myself for the Mystery. That place, with those people, is today making me live happily. Not always though, well, okay. Thank you.

Thank you because we who have been here for a long time need to hear your surprise. In fact, when one experiences this surprise he can be pulled out of his own mind-set. As we said before, it is enough to get involved with the simplicity with which you got involved. No matter the point of departure, it is enough that one is willing to share life, because the proposal that the Church makes to us is that of a life to which one is invited to get involved. Nobody tried to convince you of something; they simply invited you to study with them, to participate in the life they lived, and by being involved with this life, what you have related to us happened. Those who commit themselves like you did will be surprised to experience something unthinkable even in situations in which one would not expect it, even in situations that are upsetting. The testimony we have just heard shows to what extent the Church "entrusts itself to the judgment of our experience and, indeed, it constantly urges that experience walk its path in completeness" (pp. 205–06).

The question of the hundredfold on which we are working has always been a spur in my life, and it is very interesting that it comes back today. Why? Because I often confused the hundredfold with balance. Since I made mistakes in my life and I also carry some wounds, I thought that I couldn't be happy, that at most I could reach a balance, keeping at bay all the issues and difficulties that I had and have. Until I met a way of being looked at that understood this limitation of mine, a look both of friends and of the boys of my school, a simplicity in which I found a path for myself. What did I do then? I went back and went back again to them, I got involved with them, I got deeply involved with their lives. What did this bring? An experience of joy that I couldn't have imagined. The wounds are still there—actually today I feel them much more, but God is making me understand that you can be happy even with all your wounds. We must not remove these wounds, we must not eliminate them; the hundredfold happens inside the rubble of my life, because it is His

work. This is also what I saw in Aleppo, where I saw life rise up again in the rubble, because the hundredfold happens due to His initiative and not because I am capable of it.

We heard at Beginning Day that something absolutely unforeseen happens. After so much suffering you didn't think something could still happen, but God can always surprise us, even through people as young as your students, who reopened your whole life again, to the point that you could say, "It happens inside my rubble." But this implies accepting a struggle between what I think and what Christ does.

During the work on Alive Means Present! I felt taken by this text and that it was mine, close to me. I invited three university classmates to the School of Community. I wanted to learn to live with them what I live in CLU because everything about my relationship with them seemed difficult. I had prejudices about them, and I felt bad about it. Not knowing how to get out of my habit of judging them, I thought it would be simpler for me to show them the beautiful things I was seeing in the School of Community but that I struggled to see in them. They accepted my invitation, even though I consider myself the worst of Christians because of how many times I repeat my mistakes (because I want to save myself and do things in my own way). They came because they were invited and, before starting, they asked me a thousand questions on a short piece from Beginning Day that I had read with them. "The announcement is the presence of a person fully engaged in a meaning of the world, in a meaning of life" (Alive Means Present!, Suppl. Traces, n.9/2018, p. 10). One of my classmates said to me, "You are this every day for us and it is for this reason that we are here! You are a presence in the classroom, every day." It strikes me how people see something in me that I cannot see in myself yet. God could have chosen someone else for them but instead He chose me. It seems to me that He does things in an absurd, unimaginable way, but it is such a beautiful way because it always leaves me free to decide. That is why I feel am the worst of Christians, because in my freedom I make mistakes, because I repeat my mistakes. Yet, I don't want to live in a way that is less than what they see in me—this would be going backwards in the face of what I have been told but still don't understand. On this I cannot cheat—I am on a journey and I must be available to face it with an open heart, even if I don't know what is waiting for me, even if I know that I will fall again, even if I do not feel up to it.

Living in this way is such a novelty that one doesn't want to go back, even if one realizes his mistakes. The mistakes no longer stop him. This is the progress that is achieved, this is the road that slowly emerges: a lived experience.

I find it striking in this School of Community how the verification of the presence of the divine in the life of the Church is something that must pass not so much through a theory to be studied or understood, but through a lived experience, through a carnality that is experienced. It struck me that the text speaks of this carnality, of this passing through flesh: "Each one of us [...] seeks just that: greater fulfillment. This is the criterion that guides us, even in the least important of our choices. Men accept this or that invitation [...] because, in making their choices, they hope for more satisfaction, more intense correspondence with their heart's desire" (pp. 206–07). As a gesture of charitable work I accompany a young man who is looking for a job. Unfortunately, he has not found one during this period. I wondered: what is the sense of using my time for this if the outcome is negative, if my contribution doesn't seem very useful? This was the question I carried inside me during this period, and it was answered by "The Meaning of Charitable Work," which I recently reread: "It is the discovery of the fact that precisely because we love them, we are not the

ones who make them happy. [...] *It is an Other who can make them happy*” (*The Meaning of Charitable Work*, p. 3). *This made me grasp the dynamic that, if I am sincere, has truly been changing my heart in this period. Even more, thanks to this negative outcome, it is clear that my relationship with this young man is a mystery, it is a relationship with a mystery. It isn't a relationship defined by immediate success, but by something that comes first. Following this gesture of charitable work, choosing a precise moment of the week to be faithful to—despite life and ever-present commitments—is what makes me experience most of all the “poverty of spirit” of which Giussani speaks, and thanks to this lately I have been realizing how He revolutionizes my life. He constantly changes it.*

As we saw, one who truly involves himself with the experience of the life of the Church, whatever the starting situation in which he finds himself, sooner or later cannot but verify how much it makes him experience reality—even in the midst of the rubble—according to a way of living everything that is a hundred times better. This way of living doesn't spare us the rubble. And we do not have to erase the wounds, the illnesses, or the challenges in order to live, because we will be able to face them with the different outlook we have heard being described today in your contributions. This is fundamental for the path of certainty, because if we cannot recognize the hundredfold in daily life we will not reach the certainty that overcomes every kind of skepticism (about our limitations and the limitations of others). All of this happens through a community full of limitations like ours because no limitation can prevent us from making this verification. Therefore, we must not censor anything of what is there, of our humanity or of the humanity of those who carry the meaning of life. To experience the hundredfold it is enough to accept sharing the life that is within them.

We do not turn the page on this chapter. It must be a constant part of our life, because in this journey there is not a “before” that would be the religious sense, then the Christian claim, then the life of the Church, and finally us making a judgment. No, everything is given at the same time, and this chapter summarizes the entire Christian proposal, indicating the method so that it is not reduced to a theoretical repetition, but is always a lived experience, the only one that makes us recognize the answer to the question: “Can I experience Christ now in order to reach the certainty I need to make a decision on a question of this importance?” Each one should verify whether the testimony of those who are making this journey represents the possibility for answering this question.

The next School of Community will be held on Wednesday, December 19th, at 9.00 pm.

We will continue with the second part of *Why the Church?* by Fr. Giussani. We will work on the second chapter, “The Tree Can Be Told By Its Fruit,” which is fundamental for picking fruit that is not separated from the root, from pp. 210–19.

I would like to point out that on the CL website, in the “School of Community” section, we have made available the audio files [Italian only] of the parts of *Why the Church?* we are working on. This seems to us to be an additional help for working on the text.

Food Collection and AVSI Tents. I would like to briefly recall what we said to each other at the last School of Community regarding the charitable gestures we are proposing in this period: the Food Collection and the AVSI Tents. These gestures are first and foremost a challenge for our verification, they test if our moving—by making these gestures—arises from an experience of

gratitude, from the experience of a “fullness” that we feel the urgent need to communicate, thus being free from the outcome, or if it arises from a lack that we need to fill with new “projects” in order to “have the feeling of existing” (as Fr. Giussani used to say).

If the origin is an infinite gratitude that overflows from our person, what we will do will be apparently the same, but the meaning—the density—that it will bring with it will be totally different. This is the difference between a gesture of voluntary service and a gesture of charity like the one we are proposing: if our actions bring hope for a lifetime (because this is what everyone is waiting for in order to live), or if we are content to give an answer to a material need without communicating the one thing that Jesus brought when He responded to the needs of the people: that they were no longer alone like dogs and that therefore there was hope.

The people we meet will be able to perceive that there is a difference in the way we perform these gestures, that what they see is not exhausted in the gesture itself, but rather refers to something else, that it is the testimony of something absolutely unpredictable; that is, the Christian announcement. This is my concern: that the gestures are not disconnected from the source of our experience, that we do not lose their link with the origin, because the alternative to this can only be skepticism; and above all, that we will not communicate what interests us most, that is, from where what we do is born.

So we must first of all be concerned about living these gestures personally. Only if we live them can what we want to communicate reach others. How it reaches them is not our problem. Our task is to be imbued with this awareness, because then it will come through, it will reach others almost without us being aware of it.

For this reason, in preparation for these gestures, I invite everyone to reread the booklet by Fr. Giussani “The Meaning Of Charitable Work” (which can be downloaded from the CL website). Let’s reread it to help us live these gestures in connection with the contents of the School of Community that we are entering deeply into.

The book of the month for December and January will be *Santi [What are Saints]*, by C. C. Martindale, with an introduction by Luigi Giussani [in the Italian version published by Jaca Book]. It seems to us that this book on the life of the saints can be an example of the work of verification that the School of Community is proposing to us, especially regarding one of the characteristics of the Church, that is, holiness.

CL website and Traces. *Tracce’s* subscriptions campaign, which is the most effective form of support for the magazine and the CL website, has begun. In this moment of confusion on many fronts, we feel that the companionship is a very important help for looking at what the Mystery has made happen among us, and we attempt to show this on the CL website.

We try to use the magazine *Traces* to go deeper into the issues we feel are critical to the cultural debate that is happening within the Church and in society. It isn’t a deepening for “insiders,” but for everyone. I realize more and more—in part based on the opportunities to travel and speak with people I had for the presentations of my books—that so many questions have now reached, let’s say, a “global” level. I understand that the use of these tools is by no means to be taken for granted and that only within a journey can we relearn the taste for knowledge, for a broader conception of reason.

So let us help each other in this work.

Christmas Poster. The image this year is “The Adoration of the Magi” (1457) by Elia and Giovanni Gagini, Genoa.

The first sentence is from Pope Francis: “The joy of the Gospel fills the heart and the lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept His offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. I never tire of repeating those words of Benedict XVI which take us to the very heart of the Gospel, ‘Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a Person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.’”

The second sentence is by Fr. Giussani: “Try to imagine that girl who was at home and received the announcement: Our Lady. The ultimate example of something that couldn’t be reduced to the prior events which made up her present reality. Just think of what the shepherds must have felt at the Angel’s announcement, or the wise men at the announcement of which the star was a sign. A radical newness; new at an absolutely new level; it could not be and is here; it could not be because we never would’ve thought of it, we couldn’t imagine it, and it is here. Christianity is the event of this announcement. Announcement not, first and foremost in that I hear it, but inasmuch as it presents itself to me: something that is outside of us and that proposes itself deep within us, but is outside of us. Christianity is a presence within your daily life, a presence that guarantees an unimaginable change, unimaginable.”

Veni Sancte Spiritus

Good evening to all!