

*Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, December 19, 2018*

Reference text: L. Giussani, Why the Church? McGill-Queens University Press 2001, pp. 210–19

- *Haja o que houver*
- *Da font de me anime*

Glory Be

Good evening, everyone! We are going to tackle the chapter of School of Community titled “The Tree Can Be Told By Its Fruit,” which begins by recalling us to the initial theme of *Why The Church?* that the fruits of Christian life are born from the Church. Yet, what is the Church? “The Church is a life.” Consequently, “We must involve our lives with it in order to judge it” (p. 210). Only those who are involved with the life of the Church, those who share the life of the Church where it is lived authentically can expect these fruits. Not any place, not any way of participating in the Church, automatically produces the fruits. Fr. Giussani reminds us constantly that nothing is mechanical in human life. That is why the first condition is that one participate in a place where he can have a true Christian experience; this is the condition. If the Church is truly lived in all its expressions, this will be seen from the capacity it has to produce the fruits, because “the tree is known from its fruit.” There is no discussion about this: from the fruit we see that the tree is good and we see whether we participate in a place that is true. If we involve ourselves with the life of the Church, at a certain moment we are surprised by seeing something new in us, because the fruits are the results of the effectiveness of this life that is communicated to us; they are the sign that the Church is the place where the Mystery is at work. This is what we are trying to understand throughout our work on the book: if the Church is the extension of Christ I must be able to have an experience so real, so true, that I decide to adhere to Christ.

In the Creed, the Church is defined by these characteristics: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. These are the fruits that describe its effectiveness. Today we face the theme of unity, which is “the first characteristic”—says Fr. Giussani—“of anything that lives” (p. 211). It is what Jesus wanted to communicate, a surprising unity, like the unity He lives with the Father. So much so that from this unity, when it is communicated, we can recognize that Christ has accomplished the Father’s plan: “As you, Father, are in me and I in you, may they also be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me” (cf. Jn 17:21). So many times we stop at this level of unity, unity among us, but to be able to live this unity among us we must first find a surprising unity within ourselves, in our life, a unity that responds to a need we have. One might ask: Why is this unity so crucial? Why is unity one of the fruits of the effectiveness of Christ? It is enough to think of when we live reality with inner unity, and when instead we are all fragmented and only want to escape from a circumstance because it suffocates us. We all have the desire to be ourselves, to be our true selves, to live truly what we are living, the moment we are living. Therefore, this evening we want to verify whether and how we have found a surprising need for unity starting from what we live.

On Saturday, November 24th, in the morning, I participated in the Food Collection at a small supermarket, along with five friends of my group of School of Community. It was the first shift of the day and with boldness in our hearts we set up the station, the cartons, the online registration of

the food items and so on, and with the normal organizational ability that distinguishes five experienced mothers we began the gesture. The gesture was the evidence of a unity between us, of our unity within the gesture of the Food Collection and of a desire for fullness that I have long begged to rediscover in everyday life—in my relationship with my husband and children, in going to work, in making the beds, in hanging out the clothes to dry, and in tidying up the house. I spent the whole day in front of unexpected encounters that clearly showed me the presence of the Lord. At about 10:00 a young father arrived with a group of boys from a nearby parish youth group and the young priest who accompanied them, and he began to organize the weighing of the boxes in a very efficient way. It was a spectacle in front of which we watched together what the Lord was doing for us. Then, in the afternoon, eight high school girls arrived, who maybe came just for me—I am their teacher and I had invited them. Also on this second occasion, helped by a friend who was next to me, I let the Lord work through them, I let them take the initiative. It was a real opportunity to meet with those girls and with the most varied human types that entered the supermarket. Together with my friends, and having the same availability, we also joined the AVSI gesture that took place in our area. Now the question I carry in my heart is: What helps to have the same desire for fullness in everyday life in all its facets, beautiful and ugly, tiring or not, but still given? Does it relate to making a journey in the way I am looking at everything and therefore in the way I judge? Is it about following? Is it about praying? Is it about being faithful to the work of School of Community? Can all of this help us move toward poverty of spirit?

Do you see? By participating—as you said—in a gesture, immediately a unity among you became evident. The way in which the day unfolded made you desire that what you had lived during the Food Collection could become a daily experience. This is the sign of the effectiveness of the Church: you went home with a greater desire not to lose what you had experienced on that special day. This corresponds to us so much that we desire this dynamism to be introduced into our entire life. Along the way, from the testimonies of people, we will see how to answer the question: What path must we take to make this become true in our life? How can we help this become a reality? In fact, often we find ourselves with a desire for unity that doesn't come true, and it is as if our life is composed of watertight compartments.

These last few weeks have been quite tiring for me; between lessons, workshops, and other commitments, I find myself always living in a rush. Even when I can stop for a moment, for example to have lunch with my friends, I always have to keep an eye on the clock so as not to be late for the next commitment. Because I am always in a hurry, I often seem to lose myself while accomplishing the things I need to do, without having a moment to breathe, to look at myself, to ask myself how I am. The result is that everything becomes cumbersome (also because, over the weeks, fatigue builds up), even if, taken individually, I like the things I do: I am engaged in interesting courses, I like being in the lab, I'm interested in following the work taking place with the representatives of the students of my faculty and the people belonging to the Cattolici Popolari group (CP). Thus, I feel the question of unity being directed at me. The words of Fr. Giussani describe a way of life that for now I don't see in me but that I desire very much. It seems to me that my life is made of "watertight compartments," and it is difficult for me to find a point that unites everything, partly because the things I do are very different from each other. How can one experience the unity of which the text speaks in everyday things? I realize that to begin to understand an answer a journey is necessary, but for this I need someone to follow. I understand that it is essential to have a clear criterion; I

can intuit what that may be, but I also struggle with it. In the morning maybe I say Morning Prayer or go to Mass, but during the day I seem to live in forgetfulness. Therefore, I wanted to ask you for help on this point: What does living this unity mean to you?

First of all, what has emerged clearly in you from what you have recounted? What is the most striking thing?

That I am not able to do it on my own.

That unity is not something we can build ourselves. It seems banal. Therefore, when the Church says that the effectiveness of her proposal is seen in the “unity of conscience” (p. 212) that she generates, she is making a promise that corresponds to what you desire: you do not know how to get there, but you want it; you are not able to produce it, but it is what you want. This awareness is fundamental, because then I don’t need to beat myself up, but simply recognize that I cannot do it alone, that I cannot put all the pieces of life together, that many times I get lost accomplishing the things I need to do, and the consequence is anxiety and anguish. What can help me? What is the promise made by the Church? How do we begin to glimpse this unity, so that life is no longer fragmented into watertight compartments? Now that the question is clear, let’s pay attention to grasping the answer in the contributions that follow, which are the starting point for tackling the problem.

My life these days has been absolutely ordinary: home, school, family. The question I had was: How am I discovering the unity of conscience? Watching myself live, I realized that the memory of Christ is becoming normal (I was very struck, in fact, to read in “La convenienza umana della fede” [The human relevance of faith] about “memory as the norm” of living). Only in a dialogue with the presence of Christ, only if His memory is alive in me, can I live everything, because everything is an opportunity to penetrate this relationship. I will try to give some examples (they are seemingly insignificant, yet for me they were relevant). A few days ago I went by chance and in a hurry to a coffee shop I had never been to. As soon as I crossed the threshold, I regretted it: it was small, dark, and dirty. The lady at the counter was sad and abrupt. While I was eating breakfast I thought: now I will go to school and tell my colleagues about this bad place. But I stopped mid-thought, because another thought surfaced: How does Christ look at these people? He loves them infinitely, just as he loves me infinitely. At that point, I laid eyes on the lady and I realized that I had not even looked her in the face. I felt an infinite tenderness for her. I found myself moved by affection for her and the other people in there. Another example: at school I have a student who is lazy and a bit sassy. During a test she came to ask me a question and, as usual, she was panicked. Normally I would have treated her a little sharply, but instead at that moment I was moved even though up to that point I had looked at her only for what she was not. The same dynamic happened again, however: she is precious in His eyes, and for this reason she is my friend! So I answered her question by encouraging her to work, sure that she could do it. She looked at me baffled because she thought I was no longer expecting anything from her. And she too no longer expected anything from herself. For the first time, she dried her tears and started to really work. Last episode: Saturday morning I was woken up early by my oldest daughter because the younger one had spilled the whole cup of breakfast milk on herself. It was 7:00 on Saturday morning but I got up (for me this is early on a Saturday morning); for a moment I felt a crazy sense of estrangement from everything. But as is described in The Religious Sense, after that instant of unease, I looked at things, at all things, with a renewed amazement: my daughters, my bed, the

overturned milk and the cup, they all exist! I am there and God gives them to me so that in the things around me, in living life, I may know Him more, I may grow in affection for Him and discover pieces of myself that I had never seen, truer parts of myself. At that point, you want to live everything—nothing is alien or frightening anymore! I told my mother about this and she said that it is not a given that someone else will understand it because it may seem ultimately like voluntarism, some ability of mine. I thought about it and realized two things. First of all, that those who know me well know that this is not the case. But also that, even if someone thinks it is voluntarism, it would be their problem! I am sure of what is happening to me and I don't need to persuade people. Not that you don't want to tell everyone (in fact I do), but I'm not blackmailed by what others think. This for me is something completely new because I have always needed other people's approval to be sure.

We have seen that a person cannot produce unity by her own attempts. Where did you begin to discover the newness of this unity? You have already said it—I don't know anything except what you people recount; I don't have a direct line to the Holy Spirit. This evening two points of departure emerged on which two different methods depend. The first is that you try to do it and you can't. Instead, what did you start from?

From the fact that the Lord loves me.

“Watching myself live, I realized that the memory of Christ is becoming normal”! Do you understand the connection between what we said at the Fraternity Exercises on familiarity with Christ and daily living? It is a familiarity that doesn't spare me any challenge (like the lady at the coffee shop, your student, yourself, your daughter), but that brings out the hope that is in you in response to events—to say it with Fr. Giussani. There is something that precedes me: my memory of Christ, my recognition of Christ, my familiarity with Him. From this familiarity that one lives, and which couldn't be lived except in one place—the Church—is born the fruit of a unity that can change one thing, and then another, and then another and another. Instead of living in “watertight compartments,” everything speaks to us of Him. The result is a unity not achieved with our own attempts or efforts, but unity resulting in “clarity of the meaning of existence, such that the principle behind our judgment of ourselves and the world is the one unequivocal Presence” (p. 212), a Presence that so much informs my way of looking at things that I can no longer look at reality and at everything that happens to me except from this point of view.

Reading this paragraph on unity has required a lot of work, and I don't deny that I had a hard time understanding the text. Every day I reread it and I seemed to understand something else. But I still have a lot of questions. I will try to summarize them in these two. The first is: Could you explain to me, perhaps with an example, what it means that the criterion of the Christian in the face of everything is a Person? The answer has already been hinted at a bit.

A bit. We will go deeper.

The second concerns the point “Unity as a way of life”: during this period, I have experienced numerous hardships, especially physical ones, and I almost spontaneously offered my suffering for some painful situations of which I was aware. Then, the paragraph that beings, “According to the tradition of the Church, there is [...] no gesture [...] that is not responsible for the universe, that is not an act of eternal value” (p. 216), raised some thoughts in me. I am sure from experience that even the most difficult circumstances are not useless and that they are given for me, but this line from the text seems to say something even greater—that each of our actions is a collaboration

with the saving action of God. Therefore, I ask you this: is this always true, independently of the consciousness with which I live or perform a certain gesture? And then, is this a dogma, like the Trinity? Or is it something I can verify?

Let's start with the first question you asked, "Could you explain to me, perhaps with an example, what it means that the criterion of the Christian in the face of everything is a Person?" Let's start with a person (lower case), because only if one understands this in relation to a person (lower case) will he be able to understand it—by analogy—in reference to the (upper case) Person.

With a dear friend I was a guest of two friends who became parents a few weeks ago. The little girl was born on November 22nd and—as you can easily imagine—has revolutionized the life of her mother and her father. While I was still in the car, I received a message from the father that said, "When you arrive call me and I will come down to open the door." We were a bit surprised and we thought that the intercom was broken. In fact, when we arrived he came to meet us and explained that the little girl was sleeping, and that's why he had asked us not to ring the bell. When we entered the house an impressive silence reigned. The dad went into the kitchen and began to prepare the roast for the table. I was shocked, because every gesture he made—from turning on the faucet (I am not joking!) to moving pots and pans on the stove—was dictated by a simple fact: the little one upstairs is sleeping and we must not wake her up! The mom arrived with a radiant face and greeted us. Even my friend and I, their guests, tried to make as little noise as possible in greeting her. We had become involved too—and this is the point that amazes me—in that new way of relating, in that new way of moving, full of attention and availability, which the child, because of the simple fact of her existence, was the cause of. Every action of that evening was a reverberation of that new relationship, so real and present that it created that attention, that care, that new way. There were no rules or impositions; there was only her: the little one upstairs. Even though we hadn't seen her yet for even a second, everything, truly everything, spoke of her. It was in the eyes of those two parents, so moved and wide open in front of the adventure on which they desire to verify the fidelity of the One who called them; their faces so happy, a powerful sign of what is happening to them. The parents and all of us in that room put the cutlery down on the table so gently to avoid making noise. Here is the echo of the text: there was no action that happened that evening, however small and secret, that didn't reflect the presence of the little girl. This was so true that, in an totally unexpected way, our expectant desire to see her that we had at the beginning of dinner had been replaced by a certain waiting because, in some deep way, we had already met that baby. All of the reality we were seeing was speaking about her. Every action that night could be explained in light of the fact that she was there. So, by looking at what happened there, the concept of merit became clear to me: "There is no thought, however secret, no gesture however insignificant, and no action, however hidden, that is not responsible for the universe," motivated by "that profound bond with the presence of Christ in the world" (p. 216).

I asked you to offer your contribution because so many times we complicate our lives. Instead, as you can see, it is easy to recognize when a presence determines all the factors of life: the awareness of that little girl who slept upstairs was enough to determine the whole evening. That is why, as we said before, only if a presence is so familiar and present as to take hold of our lives to the point of realizing that everything is lived in relationship with it can everything be united; there is a unity because we strive to live everything for that presence. Christ didn't invent another method—he introduced into our life a Presence, His, infinitely more powerful than the little girl who is sleeping.

The question is whether we can live our days, even in the midst of distraction, recovering from time to time the awareness of that Presence that unifies all the factors of reality, even factors one might try to deny.

I was very struck by this passage of the School of Community: “Here lies the genius of the Catholic vision of life. [...] the divine in the Church has no need to deny anything. Its very attitude is unity. It looks for the good in all things. It is scandalized by nothing. This is to say that the Church can be certain that it does not have to overlook or renege on any point in order to be faithful to its origins” (p. 212). Little by little these words penetrated me and I began to realize that there are many, many things that I deny or forget about myself, of my story. But at the same time, the desire that my life can be united from within, even when I’m at home doing my chores and the house is empty, has never been so vivid in me. So I started looking at myself and I saw many things. I deny and forget that the evil I do and the evil I suffer hurt me deeply, and this is a great moment of verification on my path. To begin to look at things that hurt, relationships I ended, people who left me, the illnesses of some of my children, and be able to say, “In the end, I’m afraid of this, and who is able to get me back on my feet?” The other day my youngest boy, six years old, had driven me crazy all day and I finally slapped him in exasperation. He stared at me—he didn’t expect it, and he threw himself on the sofa with his face hidden in the cushion. He stayed there for a while (before he finally rushed to hug me). His hiding, that wanting to see nothing, made me feel a great tenderness for him. In the evening I thought, “He behaved exactly like me! I too, in front of a wound, contort myself, bend over myself and don’t see anything else, except the fact that I was wounded!” During this period, having the courage to look at all of my humanity makes me realize that there is a Presence that wants me to achieve unity. I want to be able to look in the face the One Who gives me rest. A bit like my son does with me.

What made your son look for you again?

The fact that I stayed.

Perfect! It is simple. We too want to run away, like the child. What can give us the courage to look at all of our humanity, what gives us unity? That Presence. Without a Presence like the one we have met, we only dream of this unity. And not because we do not desire it, but because when certain things happen we are not able to look at ourselves with the same tenderness with which Christ looks at us. This different gaze on ourselves is not the result of an effort—it is the fruit of our participation in a life, the life of the Church, in which we are looked at like that, in which the gaze of Christ is communicated to us. This is what makes it possible to look at even the most mysterious things that happen, the most painful, because nothing is excluded.

The reading of the pages on unity struck me because we are in a world where everything seems to be crumbling, in which so many divisions have opened up within the Church and the Movement itself. I read and reread these pages and I was very wounded: I wanted to understand what this unity with which the Church “shines” is about. This question has recently tormented me—it was the question with which I woke up in the morning. Last Wednesday, with this wound inside, I attended the funeral of a distant relative of mine who had died suddenly. Years ago he and his wife had lost their only daughter, who died in an accident. At the time they were atheists. But the pain of their daughter’s death had opened them to take note of the Christian community in a particular form, that of the community of friars who care for the Holy Family Institute of Cesano Boscone, and who are their neighbors. That friendship gave birth to an awesome conversion of the wife first,

and then also of her husband. The husband had said of himself, "If the Lord hadn't changed me like that, nothing else could have changed me!" What does all of this have to do with the question of unity from which I began? It has to do with it—first—because in that church overflowing with people next to his wife, in those places where close relatives usually sit at the funeral, all the people of the community were present, showing that Christ creates a visible bond of unity stronger than that of flesh and blood. Second: the wife said a few words at the conclusion of the Mass, mentioning their story, and said—the words are hers, not mine—that the death of their daughter "was a point of reality that opened us to think of God." While I was listening to her, all of a sudden it became clear to me what unity as a way of life means, because every time and every space "invaded" by Christ becomes a place where His closeness manifests itself, even in the mystery of the death of a daughter. What did that say to me and to my wound? First that unity is created by God, so where there is lack of unity I must not force myself to build it (also not doing the opposite, though, increasing divisions), but I have to look for its foundation, that is, to put back at the center, as the theme, the One who is the sole foundation of unity. Second, I was struck by the fact that when I do the work of School of Community seriously, reality "has meaning," that is, it responds to me. The dullness of reality that doesn't speak always begins with my own dullness.

Here we see how reality responds to the question we have often asked ourselves in this work. How was the unity of the person built after a wound as big as the death of a daughter? It was not the parents who built the unity that you could see in them. The daughter's death was that point of reality that opened them, and this opening made it possible to welcome a Presence. "If the Lord hadn't changed me like that, nothing else could have changed me!" said the father, acknowledging that it is impossible to achieve unity by our attempts. But how did the Lord build that unity to make it concrete? What makes it possible to build unity, to increase it—as we said at the beginning—is sharing the life of the Church where the Church is lived authentically, "wherever it is seriously lived" (p. 210), in this case in that community of friars. It is Christ himself, present in the Christian community, who builds the unity of the person after such a deep wound. In fact, when one opens up to Him in the Christian community, He "creates a visible bond of unity stronger than that of flesh and blood." This experience allows us to understand unity as a way of life, as you said. In addition, it answers a question that a person who couldn't come tonight asked: "How do we recover from the blows that life deals us?" We have seen it: we do not recover through our heroic attempts, but simply by accepting to participate —by "soaking it in," as they say—in the life of the Church. This participation gives us the ability to change and generate unity, to soothe wounds, to make people always begin again, and it occurs when one is available (there is no the need for heroism). If we don't do this, it is only because we are not available and not because the life of the Church can't effectively respond even to death and to the wound that death causes in us. So, here we are touching upon everyday life: for example, work.

Giussani states that the individual with his action, happening within a deep connection with the presence of Christ, is responsible for the destiny of the world. At a certain point, he begins to talk about work in terms that intrigued me and struck me, and I was sorry that I didn't fully understand them. I am referring to the passage, "The more we immerse ourselves in the sacramental gesture, the more we feel borne towards that moment in time when human beings will be in their rightful place in the world once more, when they will be before God" (p. 219). What does this mean? Why does he speak of the sacraments? The only thing that comes to mind is that even work becomes an

opportunity to stand before Him. What happens to me—sometimes, not always—is this: work is an opportunity to express myself, no doubt. The more I look at myself in what I do, the more I realize, if I am sincere, that in saying “yes” to something that needs to be done or in my sorrow for having said “no,” in the care given to a detail while working, etc., I see again a love for what I have before me that has matured by belonging to Him. This is amazing, because how, in fact, can we love reality despite all those things that appear to me as contradictions, injustices, or involving the heavy burden of life? Then Fr. Giussani continues and speaks about work as a documentation of the presence of God through miracles. Therefore, nature, from being ambiguous (and therefore distracting), returns to being “a means [something through which He manifests Himself].” I wanted some help in order to understand this new concept of work.

With regard to your question, what amazes you about the sacrament?

The sacrament is something that I have always seen as a bit distant from my life, especially when I was younger. Over time, actually ...

And what is closer to you than the sacrament? The Christian community.

Yes.

It is the Church itself that possesses in the sacraments the root of what you find in that concrete human reality that has the ability to change you—as you say—and to make even contradictions and injustices livable. The same happens with work. If you live the Christian community with this awareness, slowly the way in which you are imbued by this Presence leads you to what Saint Paul said, “Yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me” (cf. Gal 2:20). If you make space for Him every morning (for example, by reciting the Angelus, allowing Christ to enter your life), sooner or later you will be surprised to see that He determines your work, to the point that He overcomes ambiguity and permeates your work with the newness that began to affect you. You must wait in order to see it emerge as the fruit of your belonging to the Church and must not analyze work in a way that would leave you only more “cold.” Living in the Christian community—which is His sign—you have begun to see how Christ changes you. This experience will also reach the point of affecting your work. When you discover that, come back here and tell us about it. This is also what makes interesting the question of merit.

I notice a difference between how Fr. Giussani talks about merit and how I understand it and, in general, how the common mentality proposes it. I’m very interested in merit, and I always associate it with rising to the occasion. I “deserve/merit” the work I do if and only if my lessons (I am a teacher) are up to the expectations of my school and the responsibility I have, or if in working with my colleagues I can be incisive and appreciated. On the other hand, when I make mistakes, I am convinced that I don’t “deserve/merit” what I am experiencing because even though I should be up to the task, I have not succeeded in a certain circumstance. I think I can summarize it this way: for me, value is to succeed and merit coincides with what I must be. Why is this way of understanding merit wrong for Fr. Giussani? Why should the value of every circumstance and merit originate from the fact that God gives us opportunities to collaborate in His design? If so, is not this also a question of success to see if we are up to it or not?

What is the value of merit, friend? Can we give some examples in which we see that the problem is not about succeeding, isn’t about measuring up? I have always given some examples. What could Our Lady have done that is more important for you, for me and for the world, than saying

“yes” to Christ, that is, to the announcement of the angel? Do you think that Our Lady could have done something more important for the world than saying that “yes”? No. This is merit! She did not leave that village, but her “yes” was for the good of the world. As you can see, merit has nothing to do with success in the sense of measuring up. The value of a gesture, its scope, depends on its relationship with the totality. Second example: Do you think that Fr. Giussani could have done something more interesting in his life than saying “yes” to Christ? Each of us should ask himself: For what are we grateful to Fr. Giussani? For his “yes” to Christ. Here we see merit. So, what can you do for the world similar to what Giussani and Our Lady have done?

I can answer.

Not measuring up to something or not. Not succeeding or not. Because you can succeed according to the conditions you are given or you may fail. You can work as a doorman or be the Prime Minister, but from the point of view of merit nothing changes, because not everyone can be the head of the government, not everyone has the characteristics or the possibilities to do it, but one who lives his humble daily life, wiping his child’s behind, he is building the world—perhaps more effectively than the head of the government—if he lives with the awareness with which Our Lady lived. And this is a liberation, because it gives dignity to your gestures, albeit small or apparently banal. We all know very well what a grace Father Giussani’s “yes” was for us. Likewise, if someone has you as a coworker and realizes that you are good for him, it will be because of the “yes” you have said to Christ. He will be more interested in your “yes” than in your success! This is merit. And this, as you see, generates another mentality. Which is more realistic, yours or that of Fr. Giussani?

I was actually wondering what elements can help me judge which of the two is true.

This is the point. What has changed the world most? What has had a greater impact on the world, what has contributed most to the good of the world? The “yes” of Our Lady or the “success” of Pontius Pilate?

I was struck by the way in which the School of Community text speaks about newness, in particular on p. 215, “Life as novelty is experienced much more when something awaited actually happens, rather than in the change wrought between a present and a past. Even in cultural terms this novelty of life is experienced when we discover that there is correspondence, and this is only possible if there has been a ‘forerunner’—of hope, desire, expectation, need. In this case, the new is the fulfilment of that hope, the satisfaction of that desire, and the answer to that expectation. For the Christian, the new does not lie in change as such, but in the transformation set in motion by the application of this unitary principle of inclusiveness, for which the whole creation ‘is mystery.’” The last sentence is totally incomprehensible to me, but the whole passage provokes me a lot, because for me the novelty is actually my change. This often leads me to measuring and not to waiting. It is the measure that suffocates me, especially at my age—I am 63! I wonder what desire, what hope, what expectation, what need I am living. When I look at myself in the evening and see almost nothing, I realize that I don’t live a love! Can you help me? Thank you for how you help us live.

This is a sentence that we cannot lose because it is very liberating. So many times, when work suffocates us, what do we want? To change jobs. And when a circumstance chokes us, what do we want? To change circumstance. When someone annoys us, what do we want? To get away from that person. But are we sure that this is really a change? We often find ourselves running away

from a place that suffocates us to end up in another that chokes us even more. It is like someone who has a stomach ulcer: he carries it with him, so it is not enough to change restaurants. This is why Fr. Giussani says that the true novelty is not in the difference, in always doing different things, traveling here and there. The common mentality expects change from this instead of waiting for it from the only thing that really changes life: the event of Christ happening in the circumstances. In the face of this event, yes, everything becomes different, because if I let Christ enter and if He makes His presence happen in me I can live under any circumstances. This allows us to be in every circumstance with a united life, without suffocating, but rather breathing, because his present Person makes all our life different—truly all of it! By sending His Son into the world, the Mystery made Him experience this newness in His incarnation, so that we might see that even God, who transcends everything, can happen in a Man. If the risen Christ happens in us like this, any place will be a place where we can breathe. Because it is not the place that makes us breathe, but the One who happens in us in any place we find ourselves living.

The next School of Community will be held on Wednesday, January 23 at 21.00.

We continue to work on the chapter “The Tree Can be Told By Its Fruit” of *Why the Church?*

We will go over the part on *holiness* and on the *miracle*, from pp. 219–223.

On the CL website, in the School of Community section, you can find the audio files [in Italian] of the parts of the text we are working on.

You will have seen that every month Traces has a main theme—the “Close-Up”—that makes up most of the magazine. Its goal is to be a way to help us use reason to understand an issue that seems important to us at this historic moment in the life of the Movement, the Church, and society. Among the contributions to today’s School of Community we received this message: “I would like first of all to express my gratitude for the *Traces* of the month of November because through the articles “*La scoperta continua*” and “*Il processo che non finisce*” [“The Discovery Continues” and “The Process That Doesn’t End”] I have seen documented the fruit of the unity of which the School of Community speaks. It is that unity of conscience that comes directly from what Jesus revealed to us of His Being and from what He asked of us by way of participation in His Presence, that unifying simplicity in perceiving, feeling, and judging existence that coming into contact with things, events, and men, organically tends to an understanding of them that is open to all possibilities and appropriate to each circumstance [*Traces* is all of that. When we propose *Traces*, it is to help us to achieve this unitary way of looking]. The experience of unity that is documented in these articles gives me the same experience of unity that is founded on, which is the fruit of, that familiarity with the Mystery.” *Traces* is not just for those who have nothing better to read, but rather it is a tool to broaden to all aspects of reality the way of looking at everything that we learn from the School of Community. As you have seen, it is a desirable way of looking at everything.. Many want this unified attitude to reach into every aspect of reality, and *Traces* is an attempt to help us be educated to this.

Making our own the concern of Fr. Giussani we heard at Beginning Day—that Christianity be “an announcement,” something “alive,” “present,” and “irreducible” to any cultural factor or ethical value, we wanted in this December issue to document where we find this strange difference wherever it may surface, whether in Africa or in a high school in Miami.

On the [CL website](#) there is a [video](#) in Spanish with Italian subtitles of the presentation of the book *El abrazo* written by the Spanish anthropologist [Mikel Azurmendi](#) after he went to meet the realities of the Movement in Spain (charities, holidays, schools, Encuentro Madrid, School of Community) for two years. It is impressive to hear how he is amazed at the things he saw that we so often take for granted, and to hear the description of his journey to understand what he was seeing. It is an introduction to looking at the newness introduced by Christianity. It is a great contribution to our journey that I hope you will not want to miss.

In the coming days of celebration, we will exchange greetings with many people, with family, friends, and others. My wish is that the way we look at everything and everyone—truly at everything and everyone—is born, as we have seen this evening, from the awareness in me and in you of the dignity that man has acquired from the fact that God has become flesh and lives among us.

Veni Sancte Spiritus

Merry Christmas to all.