

*Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, January 23, 2019*

Reference text: L. Giussani, *Why the Church?* McGill-Queens University Press 2001, pp. 219–223.

- *Negra Sombra*
- *L'iniziativa*

Glory Be

“You are in everything and you are everything to me, within me you dwell, don’t ever leave me, shadow that always amazes me” (*Negra Sombra*, by R. de Castro and J.M. Capón). It is a fundamental desire of man to want to erase the difference between more important and less important things, but this is possible only when all things are pervaded by a Presence that makes them new. In fact, as the School of Community says, we are not able to overcome this separation on our own: “Christian holiness is poles apart from the concept of holiness in other religions, where it is understood as a separation from everyday life.” [*Translator’s note: this quotation and some others below come from the 2003 revised Italian edition of Why the Church?*] Perhaps some moments, in which some particular events happen, speak to us of that “everything,” but then we return to living that separation. That is why the song is a beautiful provocation, but more than a provocation, it is a beautiful promise: the elementary experience that one discovers being described in a song can become a daily experience because it is what we all desire. This is exactly what the Christian conception of life affirms: “Nothing is profane [from *pro-fanum*: outside the temple]” [*from the 2003 Italian edition of Why the Church?*], nothing is worthless, everything can become sacred; that is, crucial, decisive for living.

Yet, many times we wonder: How is this possible? How is it possible for a circumstance to become sacred, when to us it seems worthless, uninteresting, useless? This is a question that cannot but interest those who truly desire life. Regardless of what one does and wants in life, regardless of the image of holiness one has in mind and whether one is interested or not in being holy, one can’t help but wish that every circumstance has value! This is the first challenge to our idea of holiness offered by the School of Community, an idea of holiness that is so often reduced to something bigoted or reserved for some superhero, instead of being considered something that has to do with life, with everyday life.

A person who couldn’t be here this evening asked me, “When one of your children makes you really angry (as happened to me yesterday because my son didn’t listen to me and did his own thing), I wonder: How is it possible that this can become sacred, that is, in relation to Christ?” When your child drives you crazy, either you slam him against the wall or you are forced to look at him in his truth, which sends you back to Christ, who is the truth of your son. Yet, often we don’t follow the provocations of reality, we don’t let ourselves be awakened by them, and then it is as if a piece is always missing. But which piece?

By nature I am restless and recently even more so. The reason is very simple: lately I have found myself with a heart of stone—it seems to me that things roll off me, I seem not to retain anything of what happens to me, and in the evening I go to bed with a clear sadness and a deep sense of lack in my heart. Obviously I wondered why I feel this sadness and lack, and I couldn’t help but recognize that they are signs that translate with different words the real affection I have for Christ.

However, recognizing that doesn't seem enough to me: it doesn't make me happier or even more attentive in my days. In short, it seems to me that my heart continues to be made of stone, except for those moments of lucidity at the end of the day. What is missing, then? Why does nothing change in me? In this regard, I read the School of Community, but I had a hard time understanding the text, and even got stuck, because it seemed to me that holiness was made to coincide with a person being good and just and not stumbling over that obstacle that is sin. Since I am neither good nor just, it seemed to me to be a remote sanctity, not even so desirable, because what interests me in life is not being "good" (I wouldn't even be able to do that)! So, I ask you for help with what is the path to follow. What is missing from my experience that I'm not seeing? What does it mean "for me" to be called to holiness? I think I understand in general that the missing piece is affection for Christ, that this affection must grow...

We must leave these questions open, remembering that it is not through explanations that we can grasp what we are trying to understand, because this is revealed only in experience. That is why we help each other with our testimonies. The first question, friend, is that we all share your temptation of wanting to measure the change in us. We say "nothing changes," "I have a heart of stone," "I don't understand anything," "I don't know what holiness is," and so what prevails is always what we see that is missing. But when you are sad, when you feel your deep sense of lack, have you ever thought that this sadness and this lack could be something like a thorn inside you to make you come back to Him? Then, perhaps you would begin to realize that a change is already happening within you.

What does it mean for you to be called to holiness? It means to be called to truly live your humanity, to live everything—the lack, the sadness, the incoherence, even your evil—from within your relationship with Christ. It is not a matter of being good, in fact, precisely because you are not, you need to let Him pervade every circumstance of your life. The child cries and looks for his mother not because he is good, but because he needs her. The point, then, is to use all of these needs, as we always say, even the most trivial gesture, even the most basic lack, as an opportunity to live a relationship with Christ. This is the missing piece. The child doesn't stop at not being good, doesn't worry about that, he cries because he needs a relationship, by crying he enters into a relationship. Everything is helpful for entering into a relationship. Similarly, the call to holiness concerns the possibility that everything we live become a road, become sacred, become an opportunity for a relationship. But it is necessary to discover this in reality.

The School of Community on holiness shed light on part of my experience. When Fr. Giussani speaks of miracles, he says that "to be considered as a call to God [...] it must prove to be a personal spiritualizing factor" (p. 222). This greatly struck me, because a miracle is not something that is striking in and of itself.

What does "it must prove to be a personal spiritualizing factor" mean?

That it deepens my consciousness, so that I understand more who I am.

Who you are and what you are made for.

If it is not that, it is not a miracle, because it doesn't edify me. Immediately after this, Fr. Giussani clarifies that the condition for recognizing a miracle is that I have a "religious spirit [...] the sense of one's [my own] original subjection." He adds that the question is played out in the freedom that chooses "between self-reliance and dependence, between life as self-affirmation and life as the affirmation of Another" (p. 223). This strikes me, because an awareness of this sense of my original subjection is the only thing that allows me to see the miracles that God performs. Either I await everything from the only One who can respond to my infinite need for happiness—and this makes

*me poor and alert to signs—or I delude myself that I am no longer dependent and that what I do is what fulfills me; that is, I delude myself into being, somehow, self-sufficient. And this soon disappoints and embitters me. I will give a small example. Some friends and I organized and then gave a birthday party for the 40th birthday of a dear friend. A beautiful place, many guests, a buffet, games, videos, songs, all taken care of in every detail. The next day a friend asked me if I was happy about the party and I replied that I had arrived very tired and exhausted because in the afternoon I had worked, but adhering instant by instant to what was happening had regenerated me, even physically. Then I added, “But the thing that struck me most and that I take home is that we had prepared everything with great care, but what happened was much, much more! This is the only thing that could make that party fulfilling and not disappointing; that is, the fact that I didn’t expect fullness from what I had done, but from Him alone, that He would make full and true what I had done.” Since I felt that I had explained myself poorly, I thought of a comparison and I said to her, “The antiphon to the Offertory that says, ‘We offer You the things You gave us, and You give Yourself to us in exchange,’ has always struck me, because it is a really unequal ‘exchange’! I give You what You have given me and You give me Yourself in return. What a disproportion! But this disproportion is the only proportion adequate to my human condition. This is what happened to me at that party and that’s why I could enjoy it.” When I finished speaking to my friend, I was surprised, not only because it was true and totally corresponded to what I had experienced, but because it was as if I had understood the essential aspect of the party thanks to the words of the liturgy. When Fr. Giussani says that nothing is profane in Christianity, he says exactly that, and otherwise how would it have been possible for me to use a phrase from the liturgy to explain a profane thing like a party? Because that passage explained better than anything else my experience of that piece of reality, a profane thing, but now no longer profane, but sacred. This makes me understand that it is really true that, lived in this way, “all of reality is the great temple of God” [from the 2003 Italian edition of *Why the Church?*].*

In any situation, not only when something is missing, but also when there everything is present—for example when a party goes very well—if we are not moved beyond it, to the only One who gives meaning to everything, it is over for us. “*I did not expect fullness from what I had done, but from Him alone, that He would make full and true what I had done.*” So many times we think that life makes us sad because something is missing, and that if things would only go well we would be fine. But no, even when things go exceptionally well, if they don’t open me to the only One who can fulfill my life, I cannot say, with the liturgy, that I offer to God everything I do so that He would give Himself to me. This is what we are called to, so that everything that happens in life may become sacred. This is the journey we have been invited to make. Why? Because the more we enter into this level of reality of which holiness consists, the more life begins to become interesting, and one understands how nothing is irrelevant, nothing is profane, and everything can be sacred, everything can put me into relationship with the only One who can answer my questions. This also answers a person who asked me, “I would like to ask for an explanation about the word ‘liturgy’ as used in the section ‘Unity as a Way of Life.’” There is no better way to explain this word—liturgy—than the one we have just heard! Why? Because we understand the depth of the liturgy not only when we go to Mass, but also when we live all of reality according to the deeper dynamics of what we celebrate in Mass: we offer bread and wine to Christ and He gives us Himself. By living things this way, we begin to perceive reality in such a different way that it amazes us. “Thus,” says Fr. Giussani, “Holiness is not an abnormality [it is not something out of the ordinary]: it is nothing but the human reality that is realized according to the design that created it,” and, “The saint is the true man.” And why is he true? “Because he adheres to God” [from the 2003 Italian

edition of *Why the Church?*]. The question is whether in everything we live we can adhere to God who comes to meet us exactly through what we live.

This is what we must clarify little by little this evening: What does this adhering to God mean? What does it mean to say that holiness consists in the complete realization of one's personality?

I have a question precisely on this point made by Fr Giussani: "The saint is the individual who realizes more completely his or her own personality, what he or she is supposed to be," a "personality on the conscious path to its realization," that "is modulated in a clear consciousness of the truth and in its use of its own freedom" (pp. 219-220). This passage gave back to my heart the desire, the yearning that my life not be useless, that it can truly be realized according to the design of the One who created me. Lately, work plays two roles within me: on the one hand, it is a great ally of this yearning (because it exhorts me to a usefulness, a realization); on the other, it often makes me imagine a certain plan of realization that in case it doesn't happen would represent for me a "less." When I notice this plan that I have created in my mind, I wonder, "What shapes my personality? What determines my self-awareness?" Because of the questions it raises, I don't consider this image of realization I have made up in my mind to be a problem—for example, from the point of view of work—but I need some space to be allotted to desire a You to whom I belong. I am asking you: What indicates to you that the realization of your personality is according to God's plan, even when there is no correspondence with any of the personal images and projections of what your realization should be?

In your opinion, what are the "indicators" of the realization of your person? Let's stay with your example: in your work, what makes your person become most realized? When is the reality in front of you an ally, and when does it become an idea?

It is an ally when it opens me up.

To what does it open you up?

First and foremost, it makes me perceive myself again as a mystery to myself, while a plan I made up in my mind is something that I just have to prove.

One knows that he is realizing his personality when—says Fr. Giussani (as you mentioned earlier)—he has a clear consciousness of the truth and when he experiences an adequate use of his freedom. When am I really aware of myself? When I live reality from within a plan, to the point of suffocating, or when I have such an awareness of reality that I can breathe? This is the question. I think that one of the most spectacular phrases in this chapter is this, "The saint [...] makes Christ's presence a presence in every moment [he lives constantly in this Presence in every moment, little by little], because He, in a transparent way, determines man's action." Where do we see that? In the fact that "the saint's self-consciousness is total" (p. 220). What does this mean? When I read this sentence, which I really like a lot, I cannot but remember Graham Greene's character who lives the exactly opposite experience, "For me the present is never here" (*The End of the Affair*). That man never coincided with himself, he was never present in the moment he was living.

In short, when I have an adequate awareness of reality, I am completely present to myself in what I live. Just think about how many times you have been present today to what has happened to you and how many times you have waited for this or that thing to end in order "to start living." Then you will begin to understand how interesting the perspective that Fr. Giussani indicates is. Most of the time, instead of being fully present to ourselves in what we live, we are just waiting for something to end in order to begin to experience what, according to our images of things, should be true life. On the other hand, when one lives everything present to himself, that is, with the awareness of himself wide open to what is happening, then he breathes; even if he gets physically

tired, he can rest because he is living fully. In this sense, one understands what holiness is and why the true personality is the one who “realizes himself,” that is, “realiz[es] the idea for which he was created” (p. 220). What is the idea for which we have been created? It is happiness.

That is why the two “indicators” are self-awareness—as *clear consciousness of the truth*—and the use of one's own freedom—as *self-governance*. Yet, this is often too much for us; it seems too much to us, so much so that we don't believe it can become ours.

I wanted to go over a couple of passages from this School of Community with you. On p. 220 we read, “Human activity becomes entirely significant: every action [and I underline: every], even the apparently least incisive, acquires the nobility of a great gesture.” Shortly thereafter, on p. 222, he says, “From this point of view, then, all things are a miracle [I underline: all]: we do not realize this [I could say: I don't notice this] because it is as if we live outside the original fabric of which we are made. We tend to cut ourselves off from our original bond with objective reality.” When I read these things I felt a sort of objection, better, a question, in a slightly nobler sense.

Our skepticism comes out.

Aren't we perhaps exaggerating a little or being too optimistic in saying that every action and every thing is a miracle? Or did I not understand the implication of what he is saying on p. 223?, “Without a previous, at least implicit sympathy for God, we cannot perceive an event as a miracle.”

Let's start from the first question, then we will tackle the second. “Aren't we perhaps exaggerating a little or being too optimistic...?” Who answers your question more than anything else?

My experience.

Your experience? No! Otherwise you wouldn't have this objection. Who questions our skepticism? *Seeing a witness for whom it is ...*

The saints! The saints are those who respond to our objection. It is the clear example that Fr. Giussani offers, that of Hermann the Cripple. In the story of his life none of the objections we raise is missing.

No, no.

You think that the idea that every action can become meaningful is too optimistic.

A little naive, not feasible.

Which is like saying, “It is unreal, it is a fantasy. There is no such thing in life, it would be abnormal.” Instead here we are, put in front of a man for whom your irritation is nothing compared to Martindale's description of Hermann, and yet his life documents how it is possible for every action, even the simplest, to acquire an infinite value. For this reason, when some of us are caught in the trap of our own measure, we must at least be open to the possibility that that experience is accessible also to us, as it was for someone like Hermann, who faced many more difficulties than we do. There are no arguments that can override such a fact. Martindale writes, “Not once in his life, can he have been ‘comfortable,’ or out of pain.” None of us could describe his own life like that, but this is not the point. What do you see in Hermann instead? Not the affirmation of his moralism, but “the triumph of the Faith that inspired love, of the love that acted loyally by faith.” Fr. Giussani concludes, “Nothing cannot be transformed [even what seems impossible to us, so much so that we say that thinking of it is too optimistic] [...] if all life is being lived in relationship to the true reality [that is]—if it is ‘offered to God’” (pp. 220-221).

The real challenge that the School of Community proposes to us today is that everything—but truly everything, even what we consider absolutely profane, pain and sorrow, circumstances, life—can be transformed. One can say, “This is too optimistic, I can't even consider the possibility of

verifying it, I will ignore it,” but then one loses the possibility of verifying what Christianity has introduced into life. Who among us, whatever image of holiness he has, cannot be interested in having a full life? One may not care about holiness: “I don’t want to be holy, because I can’t imagine what it means, or because I don’t have the willpower to become a saint.” Yet, everyone cares that everything can be transformed into a fullness of life, each and every one of us here is interested in that. Holiness is exactly this. The problem is that we often don’t know how to reach this fullness, and then we get stuck.

I was very provoked by a recent event. A few days ago, the news came to me as a cold shower that the father of a friend of mine is very ill. This news that has obviously devastated everyone. At the same time, I happened to read the passage of the School of Community just mentioned, which, in speaking of Hermann the Cripple, says, “Nothing cannot be transformed and admirably show the effects of that transformation if all life is being lived in relationship to the true reality—if it is ‘offered to God’ as Christian tradition puts it” (p. 221). This passage has troubled me a lot. If I think of transformation, of the “effects” of a transformation, and therefore about a miracle, the only scenario that I can imagine is healing (which, in any case, we are continuing to pray for). However, as healing may not take place—and one must begin to evaluate this possibility too—I have a doubt when we say that everything can be transfigured (even pain, illness, etc.). Having to face the fact that the alternative is either healing or death is unbearable. Therefore we hold on to consolation so that we can handle a pain that otherwise cannot be endured. On the other hand, I realize that it is not by repeating fine words or by self-persuasion that I can overcome the uneasiness I feel in front of what Fr. Giussani says. How can I break through this wall?

In your opinion, how is it possible?

Well, that’s why I came here!

When we reach the point of being challenged by reality, faith—what faith proposes as experience—appears to us to be simply a consolation that doesn’t have the necessary substance to transform everything. How can we respond? You by saying that it is a consolation and I by saying that it isn’t? No, you only need one thing, dearest: to verify whether the story of Hermann the Cripple is a mere consolation or if his experience is possible; that is, if everything can be transformed when it is lived in relationship with true reality, that is, when one is open to the reality of Christ. How does the Mystery dismantle our ideas, how does He break our measure of things that prevents us from opening our eyes wide? Through an absolutely mysterious, but real and powerful, initiative: the Mystery begins to make us see that what seemed impossible is starting to happen.

One person (who couldn’t be here this evening) wrote to me that she was truly challenged by a particularly painful family situation in which she slowly began to let this Presence enter: “Everything changed the day when I said ‘yes’ [she began to be transformed when she began saying “yes”] to the Lord, that is, when I said to Him, ‘I am here, I don’t know how it is possible [my reason is not the measure: I don’t know how it is possible, I can’t understand how it could be possible], but I sense [I leave open the possibility] that the good for me passes through this painful circumstance. Yet, to live this situation I need You, help me to look for You every day in every circumstance’ [letting Him enter in that circumstance, she began to perceive it not as a consoling fruit of self-persuasion, but as something real]. I think that this is that hundredfold here on earth that the Lord has in store for me, even if saying this almost makes me tremble. I think this is really a miracle. It is the evidence that what for me was only a negative thing (the difficulty I mentioned) was the necessary tool used by God to make me open my eyes and really look at the situation and

at the reality that surrounds us.” The Mystery can allow a painful situation to happen, but if we live it with Him, if we say this “yes,” if we follow the way in which He leads us to destiny, then our way of looking at things begins to widen, our eyes open to see the reality that surrounds us, the true reality. The letter continues, “I understand that this may seem like a paradox, but it is actually true life, not according to my measure, but by abandoning myself to that strong and tender embrace of me and my family that I feel today. What a grace!” Everything changes when we let Him in. The cripple now is not Hermann, but rather one of us who, faced with a challenge, followed the example of Hermann the Cripple, and then began to see the signs, to see what she didn’t see before. That changed our friend’s way of perceiving the circumstances: instead of perceiving them as being against her, she began to recognize them as an instrument for that education we were talking about earlier. “God has become familiar to the life of man: his way of relating to man is expressed in a familiarity that can be experienced through the miracle. The miracle is therefore the method of God’s daily relationship with us, the way in which He becomes objective in the contingent.” [from the 2003 Italian edition of *Why the Church?*] When we begin to look at reality in this way, we experience what the School of Community says: everything becomes a miracle.

I wanted to tell you something that happened to me at work that helped me experience what the School of Community says about miracles. I work in an oncology center, and a few days ago a young woman in a terminal stage started palliative therapy. She is very young, with a very troubled family history and two young children. When she arrived my coworkers and I were left speechless by this dramatic situation and our powerlessness in front of what was happening before our eyes; we remained silent and couldn’t even look her in the eye. I was deeply saddened and I couldn’t help thinking of her and her family. I felt like I was imprisoned in a cage of sorrow which allowed no way out. As I was driving home, I told Jesus that I was very, very angry with Him, because he couldn’t let such a young mother suffer so much. I spoke with my boyfriend and he replied by asking me to say a prayer for her. I answered him, “No, absolutely not, I am not speaking with Jesus, because I am angry with Him!” Then, in the afternoon, as I was reading the part of School of Community on miracles, I just rebelled, I was quite angry, and I said, “No, I cannot say that what I saw this morning is a miracle, because it is a tragedy.” Yet, in reading what Fr. Giussani says, my heart was pierced, “We reach the point where we claim to have a critical eye, when it is really only barrenness [aridity] at play in us.” (p. 222).

Pay attention! What we call a critical position (a “critical eye”), that is, a position of realism, is nothing but aridity, “barrenness.” Do you understand the difference?

Wow, this is really true! I was entrenched in my position that I considered to be true, more intelligent, more realistic, and so on. In fact, my position was reduced, it wasn’t completely true.

“It was reduced,” and therefore arid, “barren.”

And I guessed it from a flashing warning light.

Look at this! “A flashing warning light.” Experience doesn’t allow us go on for very long without turning on some warning light. And what was the warning light?

This position gave me neither peace nor relief.

“Neither peace nor relief.”

And when a position in front of reality makes you feel stuck instead of freeing you, it means that something is missing, or something has gone wrong.

To understand it, one doesn’t need a master’s degree, it is enough to follow the signs, the warning lights of reality.

It was just like that. In reading Fr. Giussani, who described the relationship between Jesus and the Father as “immediately transparent,” I began to look at myself as in a mirror: in a second, it was as if all the moments in which by grace I lived this transparency surfaced, and they were alive more than ever. It is as if I had let this possibility enter there too at that moment. I was deeply moved and I started to cry, because I had really experienced a consolation that had broken through all my defenses. Then, yes, that young woman became a miracle for me, because reality is not a miracle when I can measure it or I can shape it to my own liking, rather miracle is “the method of God’s daily relationship with us, the way in which He becomes objective in the contingent, in concrete events.” And the good Lord used her to make Himself present to me.

Do you understand? The struggle is against our relating to reality with an aridity that prevents us from seeing but that we call a critical attitude (a “critical eye”) (“We understand things better than everyone else!”). But the warning light immediately turns on: neither peace nor relief. The alternative is to open up, and then another possibility appears, which is the opposite of aridity. What is the opposite of aridity, according to Fr. Giussani? It is reality becoming “immediately transparent” (p. 222) to our eyes, just as Jesus lived it. It is not a moralistic problem, but a position in front of reality. You don’t need any particular skill, you don’t need any particular energy, you just have to open your eyes to see reality as it happens. All you had to do was let this possibility enter and you were so moved that you couldn’t hold back from crying. Nothing but consolation! This is the objective modality of God’s relationship with us. But how can we educate ourselves to live this transparency? How does it happen? How does it become a daily way of living?

In the School of Community we read, “The more we live our faith in the presence of Christ in the Church, the more the signs of God will strike wonder in us, even in the most veiled circumstance, even when we are thinking our inmost thoughts. So there is no need for a special ‘shock’ to remind us of the great origin that constitutes life. An instant’s normality is enough” (p. 222).

Do you understand? There is no need for a special “shock,” like a Hollywood movie that strikes us: “An instant of normality is enough.”

I say this because what I have experienced in the past year has been a confirmation of the intuition I have had so many times with respect to both Christianity and the Movement; namely, the fact that nothing is automatic, and if you are helped to stay in front of reality, it’s even easier and more beautiful. This cannot be taken for granted; in fact, before reconnecting with the Movement, I had distanced myself from it because of a series of circumstances—because I didn’t accept the continuous “movement” of life, and the fact that I can’t solve everything and that there is no answer for every circumstance. I saw that things were going on in this way and so I was dissatisfied, obviously. The great discovery of this year was realizing that things happen and I just have to be attentive.

Pay attention! “The great discovery has been to realize that things happen,” that is, to realize that a miracle is happening. Correct?

Yes. I have two examples. This year I started my training in a center for acquired brain injuries, so I work with people who have a series of problems. At first I was very happy because it was a beautiful place. Then, even while still going there with a certain expectation, little by little my desire to go diminished. Yet, I see that every time I go in a position of awaiting, something always happens that surprises me. The same happens with the team of children I coach for soccer. I often go with the idea that I have to teach them everything perfectly, that things have to last a certain amount of time, but all these plans are often slowly dismantled, and when I look at what they give and show me, it is more beautiful. In these things that have happened and happen to me, the

companionship of some people (my girlfriend and some university friends) is essential for trying not to miss anything, otherwise I think I would still be stuck in last year. Unfortunately, despite all this, sometimes I struggle a lot to look and to trust. I would like to be sure that this method is suitable. I don't have it, and that's not fine with me.

This evening some suggestions have emerged as to how to attain this certainty. The question is whether you follow the initiative that the Mystery has taken with you. We need to give ourselves enough time. In this sense, you quoted the fundamental educational aspect: “*The more we live our faith in the presence of Christ in the Church,*” the more we are able to notice God’s signs, even in the most hidden situations.

On Sunday evening I was listening to Bartók’s Concert for Orchestra (a Hungarian composer who lived between the 19th and 20th centuries). Throughout the entire third movement of this composition there is an insistent presence of a very high note (a B, to be precise), performed by the piccolo, with which every other section of the orchestra enters from time to time into dialogue. What amazed me most was what was happening to me: while I was listening all my attention was directed to the piccolo, which at that moment was the protagonist of the whole performance. At that same point, however, in that single note, a dramatic struggle was taking place: on the one hand, the possibility of exhausting all my attention focusing on the part of the piccolo, being distracted, and thus losing the performance in its entirety. On the other, the possibility of using that note as the visual focus, that is, the point of view for listening to all the other parts of the orchestra that came into dialogue with it. Perhaps the centrality of that note in Bartók’s mind could only be explained in terms of the whole movement, which unifies it by being present throughout it. It was the point from which you could understand the whole piece. Such an apparently irrelevant fact, even though I love music a lot, came back to me the following morning when, as I arrived at my university, I met a friend who was distraught after having learned of the premature death of a friend’s mother. I was shocked when she told me about the complex family situation he is facing and the young age of his mother. Speechless, I spent a few moments blocked in front of death, focused on that point, just as I had been in front of the note produced by the piccolo: death becomes a point that, due to its intensity, becomes everything. Then I wondered: And if it weren’t everything? If it were the point (as horrible as it is) that, by looking at it, “the eye is designed to take in the whole spectrum?” (p. 222). The same struggle took place in front of this question: either the point of reality that I have before me is “everything,” or it is connected with the whole, that is, the place where God forces me to pay attention to Him. It is a miracle. In this struggle, the “defective sight which reduces the scope of our gaze” is defeated, that reduction which often leads me to forget the relationship between a single point of reality and its entirety. This struggle, however, didn’t take place in my mind, but before facts: the promptness with which my friend went to visit her friend who was alone in the hospital; the speed with which all the friends of the Fraternity group moved to organize themselves to be close to him; and the Rosary prayed that same evening. That point—unbearable if faced alone—had become a glimpse of embracing things as new, that is, as given. This is how I understand the School of Community when it says, “All things are a miracle” (p. 222). Even a musical note in a concert, if lived from within the original fabric that constitutes me, can force me to pay attention to Him always, even in front of death.

And when one begins to experience this, desire explodes.

In your recent interview with Corriere della Sera (“I sovranismi sono fallimentari. Il cristiano deve vincere la paura” [“Sovereignisms are destined to fail: The Christian must overcome fear”], conducted by Gian Guido Vecchi, 10 January 2019), I was struck by the story of the immigrant in a reception center who was moved when he was asked if he wanted meat or fish for lunch. It also struck me right now, because, in reading the School of Community, at the point where he speaks of miracles, Fr. Giussani says that they are “a particular emphasis or mark on events, and they call us inexorably to God.” Further on he adds that a miracle “is a powerful appeal for the individual, while others interpret it as merely as a matter of chance” (p. 222). Due to the experience of life that that immigrant had had, a fact that is very simple and trivial for us appeared to him as something that made him grasp something different. The fact that someone looked at him like that was a kind of miracle in his eyes and it surprised him so much that he was moved. My question is about this: it happens to me too that when in a situation, or in a personal or work relationship, I am at the end of my rope because I don’t know how to get beyond an impasse, more than ever I realize that I don’t create reality, so much so that things don’t go as I would like. What happens is that I find myself “poor” because I don’t have the instruction manual and I can’t handle things on my own but must rely on the One who—it is so evident in those moments—is holding my life in his hands. Then I find myself literally begging for an answer, that something will happen in reality that makes me understand, that sheds light on what I cannot unravel. In these moments I pay attention to everything, and strangely there is always something that happens (a verse in Vespers, a word spoken almost by chance by a friend) that answers my question with such an overabundance, in such a true way, that it inevitably makes me think of an initiative of God, something put there just for me and not by chance, and that helps me begin again. Often it doesn’t solve my situation, but my position in front of the situation certainly changes. Well, I would like this miracle to happen in every minute. I would always like to be so preferred by God. Yet, on this point Fr. Giussani says, “The more conscious and quick an individual’s sense of bond with the Other,[...] the more miraculous everything comes to be for him or her” (p. 222). So what helps me to have this position? To remain waiting and to avoid it becoming a demand?

How does the Mystery help you? Why did what you read in my interview became eloquent for you right now?

Because the connection between the experience of that man and what happens to me when I am like that man—that is, poor—struck me so much.

That is, when you recognize your dependence.

Exactly.

Dependence instead of self-sufficiency. We all feel what you said, “I would like this miracle to happen in every minute.” We would like to live reality with the transparency with which Jesus lived every moment. Why? Because life becomes something else, and then holiness begins to be interesting. Which method does God use? God draws the individual in an extraordinary way through particular facts, as we see in miracles. Saint Augustine said this in commenting on the Wedding at Cana (about which we read last Sunday in the Gospel), “God has reserved for himself to do some unusual things [the miracle of Cana in this case], to shake men out of their torpor [that causes us not to see] and call them back to his worship with new wonders” (*Comment on John’s Gospel*, Homily 8). So, what is the value of these particular moments through which He educates us, as we said before? How is this edifying function of the person’s conscience realized? Through them the Lord calls us back by widening our reason, so that we will be able to see the miracle that

is happening. What is the condition for being able to see it? It isn't enough that there are miracles, because they often happen in front of us without us seeing them. It is necessary—and so I answer the second question of the friend who spoke earlier—to have an openness, a sympathy, because without this “at least implicit sympathy for God, we cannot perceive an event as a miracle” (p. 223). Otherwise you may adopt a wrong way of looking at things that prevents you from seeing. This is the educational value of God's actions: through them he opens us up, allowing us to see what is happening before our eyes.

Yet, this asks for something from us: “Man's commitment, his willingness, must induce him, too, to open up to the verifiable existence of an event that cannot be classified in any of the categories known to purely rational or scientific wisdom” (p. 223). This is the adventure in which we are involved. If we don't want to miss the spectacle of the miracle that happens before our eyes (which often, because of our aridity and lack of transparency, we don't recognize), the only possibility is to follow the modality that educates us to take on His gaze. In this way, slowly, we begin to be surprised that we have the gaze of Jesus when he looked at the lilies of the field or the sparrows. He saw everything vibrate in the same way that the Mystery that was his Father made everything that happened an event. And everything became a miracle.

The next School of Community will be held on Wednesday, February 20 at 9:00 pm.

As we continue the chapter “The Tree Can Be Told By Its Fruit” of *Why the Church?*, we will work on the other two characteristics of holiness (as we have seen, the first is the miracle): Equilibrium and Intensity, pp. 223-226.

The book of the month for February and March is *La nostra morte non ci appartiene* [Our death does not belong to us], by Thomas Gergeon and Christophe Hennings. It tells the story of the 19 martyrs of Algeria, who were beatified last December 8th. This book ties in well with the theme of holiness that we are tackling in the School of Community. Their testimony makes us even more grateful to the Lord.

Pharmaceutical Bank. Saturday, February 9th will be Medicine Collection Day throughout Italy. Over-the-counter medicines will be collected in thousands of pharmacies, to be donated to more than 1,700 charitable institutions that take care of the poor. We are again offered an opportunity to live an act of charity, which is the heart of the way of life that Christ brought into the world. Charity, as is also well-documented in *Traces* this month—which I invite you all to read carefully—is the strongest mark of Christianity in history. Many volunteers are needed for the collection of medicines. Anyone wishing to participate can find all the necessary information on the Pharmaceutical Bank's website.

During this period holy Masses are being celebrated in Italy and abroad to commemorate the anniversary of the recognition of the Fraternity and the anniversary of Fr. Giussani's death. They are a gesture of thanksgiving for all that has been given to us through this companionship and to ask that we always remain faithful to the gift we have received.

Veni Sancte Spiritus

Good evening everyone.