

*Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón  
Milan, March 20, 2019*

Reference text: L. Giussani, *Why the Church?* McGill-Queens University Press 2001, pp. 226–32.

- “*Monologo di Giuda*” [“*Judas’s Monologue*”]
- “*Non son Sincera*” [“*I Am Not Sincere*”]

*Glory Be*

Today we tackle the other two characteristic features of the Church: catholicity and apostolicity. I was struck by the fact that Fr. Giussani’s starting point for speaking about catholicity is a statement expressed in the words of J. H. Newman, “There was one title of the Church—a title of honor, which all men agreed to give her,” a title that was obvious and was used practically from the beginning, namely “catholic.” To make it even more clearly understood, Newman contrasts this title with sects, which by definition were the opposite of a catholic reality, as they didn’t have the full breath of catholicity. Quoting Saint Paul he says, “The heretic is condemned by himself” and that no clearer witness against the sects of the earlier centuries [against what the sects were] was needed by the Church, than their own testimony to this contrast between her actual position and their own” (p. 226). In living the Church, each of us documents one or the other dimension—this too is a statement. In the way we live the Church, we place ourselves in front of everyone with one attitude or another, so that nothing needs to be added, because each position is obvious. This phrase amazes me: the “clearest witness” was “their own testimony.” In the way one carries himself in front of everyone, he says it all. The Church and the sects say what they are by their way of standing in front of everything. The Church—Giussani tells us, again quoting Newman—has become aware of herself slowly. It amazes me how he expresses it: “the distinctive characteristic” of the Church was first of all that singularity—its catholicity—experienced since the time of her origins. The beginning of everything was an experience, and the experience of the origin is the same one that each of us lives now. First of all, belonging to the Church is an experience, of which we must continuously become aware. The Church gradually became aware of this experience to the point that she understood her own “essential Catholic dimensions” (p. 227). This is fundamental: the journey the Church had to make is the one each of us must make, so that after our first experience of the Church we become truly aware of all her essential dimensions. Otherwise our awareness remains weak and in front of life’s vicissitudes, we reduce catholicity, the experience of catholicity. That is why what the text says is important, because what happened at the beginning of the history of the Church also applies to every moment of its subsequent history, the history that has reached us and that we live, that indicates what distinguishes a complete form of living the Church from a reduced one. I was struck by a person who, invited to participate in the life of the Movement, wrote me, “I was living a difficult situation. When our fourth daughter was born, we found out that she had some minor health problems, and I suddenly found myself changing my life. I went from work to staying at home, a situation that was becoming burdensome, and I felt more and more alone, perhaps depressed. A friend from our parish invited me to participate in her little School of Community group. I didn’t know what it was, I just had a vague idea based on the negative comments I had heard. Will it be a sort of cult, a sect [the question arose immediately in

her]? Yet, the fact that my friend proposed it to me was reassuring and I was sure it was something good for me.” Each of us lives a certain kind of experience that the other, in meeting us, can immediately recognize, even with respect to the question, “Will it be a sect?” Then there is the whole process of verification, during which the answer to this question will be more explicitly revealed. She continued, “With my friend I went to Beginning Day, without understanding much. I tried to be faithful to the School of Community group, to begin talking about myself and listening to the experiences of the others. I also attended a community assembly. I still don’t know well what CL is and what the future holds for me, but in these months I realized that I had changed. It is as if the “depression” had disappeared. I feel I need the people of the group, I feel that they are a gift to my life (even if our lives and what interests us have little or nothing in common). During my days, which I mostly spend with my daughter or working alone, I often find myself thinking about them [they enter into the perception she has of herself, even if she doesn’t see them often], and this comforts and supports me. I am no longer ashamed of not understanding what I read, because in the contributions, in what they say, the whole content of the book is clarified. I have discovered myself and what I am [that she is participating in a story that has all the breath of catholicity can be seen immediately through the capacity she discovers in herself to respond to a human need, so that she can discover who she is]. In spite of everything, my heart is better and everything I do has a different taste [her experience confirms the intuition she had when she met that friend]. I thank my friends for having come along my way and for holding tight that thread that I sometimes feel pulling, which reminds me of the right path.” The experience of this lady didn’t end with that beginning. Sometimes along the way we can find obstacles that challenge us to deepen what Newman says, that is, to grow in our awareness of the distinctive features of the Church.

*When I read these pages of Why the Church a doubt arose in me. The text speaks of catholicity as one of the intrinsic characteristics of the ecclesial community, “which implies a continuing diversity of mentality, culture and civilization, within the single round of one faith” (p. 227). This is an exciting prospect, because it includes everything and doesn’t eliminate anything. Yet, the doubt that arises in me is about the truth among us of this experience of totality and variety. It often seems to me that between us there are underlying rules to adhere to, without which one isn’t actually part of the group. As if I had to hide some sides of myself and show only others. So I wonder: What happens when we fall into this way of thinking? What trap do we fall into? Is it true that there are aspects of myself that cannot be given value? My first intuition, thinking back to those moments when I feel like an outsider and when I feel alone, even if I am among a thousand friends, is that the origin of this is the perception I have of myself: I am the first not to like myself, not to approve of myself, not to consider myself right, to perceive that I have some characteristics that are not valuable. The first effect of this perception is that it makes me sad and the second is that it makes me close up. It is in this context that thoughts about the community come up: I shut down to myself and then inevitably to others. The only way to start again has always been something unexpected that caught me off guard and helped me begin again. Over time this dynamic has become stronger and stronger because I began to trust and wait for help in starting again. Yet many of us are increasingly distant and less and less available to the unexpected. How can we help each other in this? How can we look at each other as we would like to be looked at, without limits or formalities?*

How can we help each other? What have you learned from what you have told us? What made you start again?

*Trusting.*

And when you don't find people you can trust? It is important to understand this. We all have a clear definition of what the Church is, but then there are—as you said—the underlying rules that mean that if I don't have certain characteristics I am not actually part of the group. It is as if all the breath of catholicity were missing. This means that many times or in certain places we live catholicity in a reduced way. We are poor wretches and at times we live our belonging to the Church with an inability to embrace the other in all his difference and to welcome the moment of the journey that person is experiencing. Then we think that we have to hide certain things to be accepted. In this regard, everyone must make a journey. You say that you suspected that “the origin is the perception I have of myself,” a perception that led you to close yourself up. This perception forced you to make a journey; otherwise, in the end we let ourselves be defined by it, as if belonging to the Church was simply being welcomed into a group and not the experience of belonging to something that makes us more and more ourselves. Sometimes, as you said, an unforeseen event returns to you an awareness of yourself and a recognition of what happened to you in your life, which makes you available to recover this awareness and can happen through the work of School of Community. You must become more and more aware of the experience you have lived so that when you find yourself in a situation like the one you described, you don't lose the awareness of what happened to you. What we said before about the Church must grow: you had a first experience, but if this doesn't become an awareness of yourself, of the essential dimensions of what happened to you, then you will depend on whether someone welcomes you or not, on the capacity of the place where you live the faith of being sufficiently welcoming. On the contrary, you belong because of a Fact that happened to you! And it is essential that this awareness of yourself grow, as you have seen; otherwise you reduce yourself, you don't like yourself, and you look at the community starting from this sorrow and this wound. Instead we need to return more and more to the place where the unexpected happens, the unexpected that gives us all the breath we need. That is why it is interesting that we recognize not only the beginning, but also the journey that needs to be taken so that the dimensions of the Church's life can shape the way we live our humanity. How do we know that it is so crucial to restart from this beginning? How do we know that we are really meeting the “catholic” Church? The text says that “the Church claims for itself the prerogative of genuine humanity” (p. 227), but what does genuine humanity mean?

*I discovered it on the way.*

Perfect. That's how we all discover it: on the way.

*I would like to offer a testimony about catholicity and then ask you a personal question. I repeat the point on p. 227: “Catholicity, then, is an essential dimension of the Church, the profound expression of its pertinence to human matters and all the variegated forms they take.” I consider my experience and look at my humanity through an expression that has characterized it completely since my childhood: depression. For me this is profoundly true: the Church corresponds to me perfectly in that particular expression of mine which is my condition, to the point that she has taught me to live it and judge it as my very particular journey with and toward Jesus Christ. My human relationships and my sense of the ultimate good of my destiny are an essential part of my improvement from this condition. Of this I am intimately certain, a certainty that comes only from*

*a judged experience. Now comes the question: sometimes you mention the nothingness that at certain times “gnaws at us.” I think you know perfectly well that my medical condition involves an intensified and debilitating experience of this nothingness. I would describe it as a sense of inner pulverization, a loss of the center of oneself, a sense of “nausea” with respect to all normal things, together with an anxiety, oppression, and panic generated by these inner experiences of the loss of self. The question I want to ask you is based on the assumption that the experience of nothingness, as I have described it, is proper—perhaps with less intensity and not being debilitating—even for someone who like you embraces his whole humanity in a catholic way, without censoring “even one iota,” not even what seems to be the exact opposite of that superabundant life that we experience in the Church. How do you live the moments when nothingness is gnawing at you, at the point of the journey you have reached? I am not asking you for recipes, but for a description of your experience, of how your journey in the Church and in the Movement has led you to live your experience of nothingness today.*

The first thing I can do is to love my humanity as it is, because this humanity of mine can go through dark periods, circumstances, moments—perhaps not as acute as those you described—that I am not spared, as you have seen on many occasions. Now, these circumstances, can be perceived as a misfortune, as something to be avoided, as something to hide, but I cannot help facing them straight on. There may be times that are more or less difficult, but there is something deeper than all the debilitating “conditions”—let's say—that one may have, all the moments in which nothingness sneaks in. It is precisely in those moments that one realizes what the core of the “I” is, the deepest part of the “I,” in which one becomes aware of all the dizziness, of the abyss that is inside this core of our “I.”

*The chasm of lack...*

Of lack, of solitude, of meaninglessness perceived in what I do, in everything, because nothing is excluded. Sometimes we try to run away from these things immediately, because we think that the sooner we overcome them, the better it is for us. But if we don't flee and allow all possible space to these moments of discomfort, to these difficulties, to this vortex, then what clearly emerges is the depth of the “I,” a depth that has deeper roots in us than how these moments and moods affect us on the surface. It is at that point that reason no longer reduces itself to recording only the most noticeable moments and that it begins to realize the depth of things. This is the moment when one can truly learn to use reason according to all its power.

*Precisely in what would seem to deny it.*

I like a lot the expression of Fr. Giussani's, “wielding reason,” because the self is not reduced to appearances. Recently, during a meeting, a friend asked me what it means to use reason. I tried to help her by telling her that if she uses reason according to the totality of the factors, according to its total openness, following the need of finding an adequate reason for all the factors of the “I”—if she uses it well, if she is educated to use it well—she cannot help but come to recognize the Mystery who makes us. And the more you use reason the more you open up to the Infinite who makes you and become attached to Him, and then you start to emerge from nothingness. Nothingness is overcome by my recognition of the One who makes me now, of Him without whom I could not exist now with all my moods and difficulties, my troubles and whatever feeling I have about things. I exist precisely because I feel all these things. If you didn't exist you couldn't feel all the things you described. Paradoxically, the more I perceive nothingness the more I realize that I am alive and that therefore an Other makes me. Then I understand that what the Church constantly

introduces me to is the truth about myself. But this is a journey that one can make or not make: one can remain at the level of appearance, and then nothingness wins; or one can follow the need to find the reason for everything, which becomes the moment of victory over nothingness, of the discovery of the bond with the Mystery who makes me now. That is why I am always amazed at how Fr. Giussani constantly invited us to this use of reason, like when, at the end of the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense*, he says that in our positivist and rationalist culture we use reason in a way that often stops at appearance, at phenomena like those you described. We get stuck there and and suffocate. The sign that we stopped at appearance, says Fr. Giussani, is the very fact that we suffocate. So, how do I know that I am using reason well? If I breathe. If through that difficult situation—not another one, not tomorrow, not the day after tomorrow—I enter into a relationship with the One who makes me. The more I use reason, the more I am invited to use it through my circumstances, because I cannot remain suffocated (as if that corresponded to me), because I am made for something else; and the more I love myself the more I need to experience it. If you don't have an urgency to do so, each of you will suffer the consequences. Instead, if a person has a minimum of love for himself, of tenderness toward himself, he cannot but desire to go to the core of himself, to the point of recognizing the One who makes him breathe. This, as Fr. Giussani says, has the ability to heal the "I." This doesn't mean that you will no longer have difficulties, but they don't frighten you any more because every time they come up you can challenge them, one after another. For this reason "catholicity is an essential dimension of the Church." Why is the Church catholic? Because it is pertinent to our humanity, to the totality of our humanity, to every human being, in any cultural, social, psychological, or whatever situation in which the "I" may find itself. "That the Church is catholic means, therefore, that the truth and the spirit of the Church, what it proclaims and the experience to which it introduces us" (p. 227) is the truth of oneself and of life. It has this truth within. It leads us to understand the whole human dimension, not reduced to its antecedent factors, and this can happen in any psychological situation, in any culture, and with any mentality, because in the Catholic Church we find the most adequate fulfillment of genuine humanity. In the text, Fr. Giussani succinctly says that "Catholicism declares its simple correspondence with all that comprises man's destiny" (p. 227). We are all called to experience it, to grasp the full extent of belonging to the Catholic Church. No one can do this for us. It is by participating in a place like the Movement that I learned to live like this, to perceive how the proposal of the Catholic Church, lived in a place like ours, through the charism that has happened to us, is pertinent to our humanity, to the humanity of every human being, in whatever situation he is in. This is the reason why I am happy to find myself living in this historical situation, because I can verify even more than with respect to a calmer, quieter context with less trouble, the powerful splendor of the diversity of the Catholic Church as compared to any way of living that is smaller and more suffocating. Because one can see it, it is written on our faces. How liberating it is when we follow, to the point of perceiving all the relevance to our humanity, to the humanity of every human being, that is found in the Church!

*At the last meeting of our small group School of Community, I spoke because I couldn't understand in my experience the conclusions drawn by Fr. Giussani at the end of the second chapter, in particular the phrase that "each one of these distinctive features [unity, sanctity, catholicity, and apostolicity] opens wide our minds and hearts so that we may drink from the rich waters of what is genuinely human, present in all humanity, whose origin is one alone, whose destiny is one alone,*

*whose journeying will take different paths, though the call is to journey in the companionship of the One whose will was to become a human gift to keep us from going astray” (p. 232). I understand that Fr. Giussani is asking for a work of verification of the experience of the divine in the Church. I feel this as decisive in this period in which I feel the challenge of my daily life responsibilities. At work I collaborate with a coworker who is going through a very difficult time in her life. She is an atheist. For some years she has been observing and questioning herself about certain positions and initiatives in which I participate. She came with me to participate in the Food Collection, and she also came with her son to the meeting that introduced the exhibit on Giancarlo Rastelli that we brought to our hospital. She asked me to keep her in mind, because when she comes with me to initiatives like those she feels good, and she is happy to see me happy. A few days ago I was asked to help her prepare an urgent report that made her very anxious, at a time when her daily concerns are taking over her life. At the end of the day she told me that “you are my Church.” The next morning, presenting the report to the head of our department, she told him, “They are my Church.” The question I asked my little group of School of Community came back to me and I was struck because I have realized that her journey is destined to recognize a Presence that accompanies her toward a good destiny and that allows her to raise her eyes again. Otherwise, as we said a while ago, daily life, especially if it is burdensome, cripples us. In the end, this is the same need I have. Except that, even if this is recognized, everything is not all right, because at work it is hard and there are still daily deadlines and our personal life that presses on. I realize that it makes sense to say every word only if I recognize and say that I am the first to need it. Then I go back to look for those “saints” who document the unity of their lives in everyday life. I realize that here is the divine value. Luckily, there is a place where I can continue to stay and to which I can entrust my desire for happiness (which is identical to the searching my coworker is doing), because there is nothing I can “do well” without acknowledging this, despite my good intentions and attempts at perfection.*

Why does this coworker say to you, “You are my Church”? And why does she say to the head of the department, “They are my Church”? What did you communicate to her, if she came to use this expression, “my Church”?

*I believe she is referring to the fact that she has seen the way I and another coworker she is close to treat each other, and the way we treat and welcome her, love and support her, even when those actions are not to be taken for granted. So, she has put together a few things she has seen for a few years and called it “her Church.” She is an atheist but is intrigued.*

That is to say that she recognizes the relevance of your presence to her humanity. By participating in your Church, in the Church that comes to her through you, she breathes and feels better. You said that sometimes everything is not all right, so what are you looking for at those times? You are so convinced about this experience that when you are in need you look for the “saints” (in quotation marks), that is, for those in whom you see a unity of life documented in everyday life.

*Which is the same thing she is looking for.*

It is the same thing that she is seeking: this breath of catholicity that concerns the whole person, and that can happen in a relationship with a single person can also happen when we speak in front of everyone.

*The paragraph about catholicity is strikingly clear and concrete. The comparison between those words and the concrete life of every day has brought out in me more clearly a precise judgment*

*about the current situation we find ourselves living. I quote from the text: “Catholicity has nothing to do with geography or statistics. If it is true that it should be displayed over all the earth and be manifest to all, yet its nature is not material but spiritual. Like sanctity, catholicity is primarily an intrinsic feature of the Church. The Church in each individual calls on the whole man, embracing him as he is in his whole nature. [...] Such methods of proposing the Christian fact [...] nevertheless bear witness to the multi-form capacity of the Christian experience to address man not as the exponent of this or that civilization, but as man” (pp. 227, 229). Your last interview with the Corriere della Sera (“I sovranismi sono fallimentari. Il cristiano deve vincere la paura” [“Sovereignisms are destined to fail: The Christian must overcome fear”] interview by G.G. Vecchi, 10 January 2019) documents this judgment. This universality corresponds more to my heart than other proposals or positions. I am thinking of the political climate and the fear that reigns in society, in the workplace, and even among ourselves, and of the difficulty of accepting the other as such, for what he is. The judgment of the “living present” contained in this paragraph produces—if I follow, if I let it inside myself—a change of mentality, of approach, of frame of mind, of judgment; it generates an “I” capable of withstanding the impact of circumstances and finding possible solutions that don’t leave out anything, that don’t leave out my heart and everyone else’s. This universality allows me to know what otherwise, all closed in on myself, I couldn’t know. We begin to create a different climate.*

What did you see in that interview that made you think of catholicity?

*That you consider the phenomenon of migrants ...*

From whom we often defend ourselves, withdrawing into ourselves or creating walls, that is, losing catholicity.

*You don’t consider it so much as a social phenomenon because you look at the person as such, at the concrete person, and this look is cast on everything, on all people as such.*

Otherwise we can be here doing School of Community and then think like all the people who, overcome by fear, close themselves up and lose the breath of catholicity, erecting walls of all kinds. The School of Community isn’t separate from what we are living, from what is happening in the world. The point about catholicity is the most pertinent judgment we can make about one of the most widespread attitudes of today: the temptation to create barriers and to close oneself up. On the contrary, we have the opportunity to live an experience so true that it doesn’t close us up, but rather opens us. For this reason, in the interview I asked: What is the contribution that the Church can offer? It is to generate places that, instead of closing them up, open people to the totality of circumstances. If a place like ours doesn’t open to this totality, if we participate in the life of the Movement and close ourselves up and think like many of our neighbors or contemporaries, in the end the experience we have will not be able to allow us a universal, catholic breath and we will begin to defend ourselves from everyone.

*Exactly.*

That is why the fourth and last characteristic of the Church, apostolicity, is so fundamental. What dimension must this place have to be able to challenge any historical moment? This is what the term “apostolicity” describes: a community that has “an authoritative point of reference” (p. 230) to face time in a unitary way, says the text. Only participation in a particular history that has a historical point of reference allows us to face in a totally original way and with an absolutely universal gaze the vicissitudes and challenges that everyone faces, a gaze that is capable of

embracing everyone. This place, this human reality, this community, has an ultimate point of reference that resides in Rome: the Pope, the Bishop of Rome. The Church has always identified throughout history, as the text describes, the authoritative reference with a historical point. It is not a decoration, it is not a hat placed on the experience of the Church, because without this authoritative point of reference there is no possibility of accessing the truth. Irenaeus's boldness is striking when he states, "We must not look for truth elsewhere," and anyone who wishes may draw the truth from the Church as the "water of Life" (p. 231). This happens within a particular history that has a historical point of reference. That is why the Church can challenge any moment in history. History changes and challenges appear to be different, always with new faces, new traits, but what resists over time?

*In this paragraph on apostolicity, I was struck by the fact that the historical dimension of the Church is "the greatest miracle" because it "constitutes the fact that the message of Jesus has taken root in the fibre of history: 'In all truth I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.'" (p. 231). In these days the son of some very dear friends committed suicide and this shattered all thought, all reasoning, all words—I wondered how you can console a mother, how you can have no sense of guilt. It would be necessary for Jesus in person to say to you, "Woman, don't cry!" and make you see that He is victorious over death. Yet, the only thing I know, and that I also told my children today when I spoke with them about it, is that I can't and I don't want to live without having this fact that happened in mind. I want to keep asking myself not "Why?" but "Who" is it worth living for? You said that "Christianity has the inconvenience of needing men in order to be encountered." Therefore the question, which came out very clearly even in my children, was, "With whom?" do we live, not only, "For whom?" With whom can I have Jesus beside me and who will tell me not to cry? Where is that reality that "constitutes the fact that the the message of Jesus has taken root in the fibre of history"? I thought I knew very well "with whom"; I know who the people are who are the sign and company of our good Lord. The problem is that my faith, that is, my awareness of what they really are—the presence of God among us—is weak, and my awareness and knowledge of this reality needs to grow.*

That is why at the beginning I started from this, from the experience at the origin of the Church and from the need to become aware of it, not because we don't have in front of us people who witness to us the characteristics of the Catholic Church, that is, people rooted before our eyes in this particular history. This experience is an invitation to my weakness to become aware of what it carries, because it is not mechanical, and everything that happens is an opportunity to make that awareness grow. So we need a journey in which we grow, and in which, when certain moments arrive that truly constitute a challenge that goes beyond daily life, we are more powerfully called to this awareness. This is the way the Church accompanies us. We have seen it, we will always have it before us from now on: nothing challenged Fr. Giussani like '68. At that very moment, in front of that challenge, he became aware of the hope that was in him and invited us to take the step from living the faith in an adolescent or infantile way to living a mature faith (to stop placing our hope in something we are told instead of discovering the hope that is in us). This is the step of maturity, that in this historical moment—due to everything that is happening on a personal level, in the particular history we have lived, in these historical circumstances—we cannot avoid. The challenges are too great: either we, as you tell us, use them to come to a greater awareness or we are overwhelmed by all the things that are happening and then move toward the nihilism and

skepticism that everyone feels. That is why the sign that we know we are in relationship with the apostolic Church is that it makes us human, makes us more ourselves. I see the signs that I am tied to this community having its ultimate foundation in the apostles in the fact that it addresses all of our humanity, whatever human experience I find myself facing. But this must be verified in every moment.

*First I want to say that, despite having studied Newman in college, I never noticed that definition of catholicity as something that “calls on the whole man, embracing him as he is in his whole nature” (p. 227), perhaps because this aspect of catholicity is becoming deeper and deeper in my experience only now. I have always had the clear perception from the beginning, from the first meeting, of finally being able to say “I” like I had never said it before. Yet, as you said at the beginning tonight, it is in time that I have been able to see, and that I continue to verify, His concrete gaze in everyday circumstances, in ordinary encounters, something that wins me over every time and reopens me. However, the point is that I find myself looking for Him not in order to be at peace with myself; I seek Him and ask for Him because at a certain point I miss everything when He is missing, and when I see Him again, this alone sets me free and makes me whole, and therefore in relationship with the humanity I encounter. What I discover, in fact, is that indeed this “is an essential dimension of the Church, the profound expression of its pertinence to human matters and all the variegated forms they take” (p. 227). I will give an example. Last Friday I went to do charitable work at the train station, like every Friday. We bring a meal and clothes to the homeless who sleep there and spend the evening with them. There are Italians, Chinese, South Americans, Romanians, Africans, Arabs, a diverse, variegated humanity. Over and over again, at different times, these people have told us, “We stop here and wait for you, because you don’t create a distance.” There are so many groups that bring support and help, but they said, “When you come it’s a party. You don’t bring us food—in one way or another, we remedy that problem anyway—but you give us your friendship.” One Friday, one of them with whom I am more in contact, a Brazilian man, responding to a volunteer who had come there for the first time and asked him, amazed at what she saw, why they trusted us and they loved us so much said, and I quote, “The reality is simple, your eyes can be clouded by life and not notice anything, but, at a certain point, if there is a lily, a single lily in a field, you must see it ... because it is too beautiful! With them it is like that, you cannot not recognize the gift they make of themselves and this opens me up and makes me want to give myself in turn.” Last Friday the same person gave me a stone that he picked up at the edge of a lake (he had gone outside Milan to look for work—somehow he tries!). On one side there was written in Portuguese, “The friend is what you keep on the left side of your chest.” On the other side, there was the somewhat stunted drawing of my face with a cross around my neck. Since I don’t wear a cross, I asked him why he had portrayed me in that way. He answered casually, “I don’t know, it came to me spontaneously, I didn’t think of it ... It’s that your friendship makes me think of God.” His answer made me tremble because I couldn’t have such a friendship with that man—this is quite clear to me—if I hadn’t experienced that Christ looks at, loves, and saves all of my humanity! Only this allows me to look at that man, from the first moment I met him, as a precious gift the way he is, without expecting him to change his life, without wanting anything from him. When I am with him, many times I catch myself feeling again what Christ has said to me throughout my whole life: “I want you to be. Just you.” It is incredible, but what Fr. Giussani says is true when he says that “because this Christ exists there is no longer any man who*

*doesn't interest me” [Is It Possible To Live This Way?, Vol. 3: Charity, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal 2009, p. 22]. So much so that when I heard the news of the attack in New Zealand, I was really terrified and hurt because I realize that without a historical encounter, without Him who reveals and defends all the dimensions of my humanity, the last bit of the other’s heart, in the end, would remain foreign to the last bit of my heart. Finally, the last time you left us with a question for Lent: “Am I following Jesus inside the story in which He presented himself to me? From what signs do I see that I am following Him?” I thank you for these questions because since that day I have been experiencing the need to stop and look at reality and judge my experience by keeping them in the corner of my eye. Even what I have just related in its exceptional normality, is a clear sign of the origin of the particular history of my relationship with Jesus and of my attraction to the charism.*

That is to say, of that particular history that has reached us and that has its roots in that apostolicity of which we are a part. For this reason, participating in this place with the dimensions we have discussed, constantly opens up to us the unity of our “I,” as we have seen in looking deeper into the unity of the Church, and opens us up to the totality of things by our participation in this apostolicity. What a grace to be able to have a place that generates us in this way, that generates people who possess all the dimensions of what is human as an experience, simply because they are immersed in the place that Christ has generated and continues to generate through the spirit of our charism, which reaches us now! It is enough that we are available, as we have heard this evening, to allow ourselves be generated in this way.

The next School of Community will be held on Wednesday May 22, at 9:00 pm.

In this period we will work on the third chapter, entitled “[Mary, you are the living fountain of hope](#),” and on the Conclusion (pp. 233-234). We will also go over the introduction to the Fraternity Exercises.

This year the Easter Poster is *Christ and the Apostles*, a detail of the frescoes in the Church of Santa Margherita (Laggio di Cadore-Belluno). Here is the phrase of Fr. Giussani’s that we have chosen, “*The people who followed Him, the disciples who followed Him, were poor wretches like you and me. All the newness of hope, the absolutely new certainty and new reality that they were, was that Presence. The contemporaneousness of that Presence with me, with my children, with those who will come after us in a hundred million years: this is the victory that conquers the world. This is the absolute newness. This is the divine in history! I remain the same poor beggar, but with Christ I am certain, I am rich. The attractiveness of my person, that is, what makes it possible to love my person, is the existence of this Presence. Indeed, it is only in a companionship with Him that a person loves himself. Only a person who carries this message can claim an affection for himself, can love himself and therefore love others.*”

You can also find it in a video version on the CL website and on CL social media channels. These are other ways to spread it and share it with friends and acquaintances.

Traces. The theme of the [Italian] March issue presented on Page One is politics, in view of the European elections at the end of May and the administrative election that will be held in some areas of Italy. We are interested in sharing the notion of living everything, and therefore politics,

as an opportunity to discover the originality that faith brings to life, the fruits that show us the tree. *Traces* helps us to widen our gaze so that we are not captured by the dominant mentality.

The book of the month for April and May is the novel *The Letters of Nicodemus* by Jan Dobraczynski (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015). A friend told me yesterday that what struck him about this novel is why Nicodemus goes to see Jesus, that is, his wife's illness. We are led to think that the things that happen to us are obstacles. On the contrary, the wound is not the end of everything, but represents the possibility of meeting the truth. This seems to me pertinent to so many human situations in which we find ourselves, like those we have heard related today.

Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity. The gesture of the Exercises begins with dinner on Friday. In order to arrive on time, please set an adequate departure time, bearing traffic in mind. The gesture is composed of silence, singing, prayer, and attention to the other. Therefore let us prepare ourselves to live it in its totality, so that it becomes effective in our lives.

*Veni Sancte Spiritus*

Good evening everyone!