

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

Reference text: L. Giussani, S. Alberto, and J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Introduction, pp. ix–xxii and “*The Christian Event as an Encounter*,” points 1–2, pp. 3–11.

- *Vi ho incontrata (Ja vstretil Vas) (I met you)*
- *Andare (Going)*

Glory Be

“Here there isn’t only a memory,” we have just heard it sung, “Here life has started speaking again, / and in You there is the same enchantment, / and in my soul there is the same love.” If anyone can say this it is only because he participates in a present event, which is the topic of our meeting of School of Community today. Here, in fact, there isn’t just a memory of the past. So, how did life start speaking again to you?

I want to tell you how struck I was by the Introduction of Generating Traces in the History of the World. I didn’t expect to be working on this text this year and I found that it totally corresponds to what my heart desires. I was immediately struck by the way in which Fr. Giussani speaks of Jesus, calling him “Man,” “the Jew, Jesus of Nazareth,” with His “voice” and his own features: “original tenderness,” “unquestionable valuing,” and “wholly positive affirmation of the destiny” of man. It aroused in me a deep nostalgia for the Jesus that Fr. Giussani helped me know and who “bewitched” me, the “Word made flesh,” whom I want to find again this year after all the ways in which I have reduced and I am still reducing Him! Jesus doesn’t exist outside the Nazarene. For this reason I have begged and I beg Our Lady that this year she may let me find Him and learn more about Him, Jesus of Nazareth, the Jesus of the encounter, the Jesus of Fr. Giussani and of the 1979 encyclical Redemptor Hominis. (That was the School of Community text when I began!) The other thing that immediately struck me is the fact that the question: “What would it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and then lose himself?” doesn’t take my breath away as it did for Fr. Giussani; in fact, sometimes this goes right over my head. (But at the beginning it wasn’t like that!) I asked myself why this is. I think it results from taking it for granted and that the problem is the reduction of Jesus to an abstraction that always looms over my journey and because I don’t realize how much nihilism penetrates my mentality. I noticed this on the occasion of the tragic death of Luca Sacchi in Rome, killed by a shot in the head. I was especially struck by the reaction of the mother of the drug dealer who killed the young man. She reported him to the police, saying, “Better in jail than a drug dealer.” This is the utmost “valuing of the fruit of her womb” that this woman could demonstrate in a nihilistic society: denouncing her son to save him! Faced with this gesture, I realized that the questions of Jesus that Fr. Giussani quoted become more significant, increase in value, are unique, and move me! No one else could say those words in a world like this. Then I tried to look at my kids through these words and my attitude changed, a thread of mercy allowed me to look at them as people in a relationship with the Mystery. As always, we cannot understand Fr. Giussani unless we start from our own experience. Otherwise Jesus and what He said remain abstract!

I think what you said is a beautiful introduction to the journey that we begin this evening. Why? Because already from the first impact with the text you felt a nostalgia for Jesus reawakening in you. Why? Because many times you reduced Him, as so many of us can verify from our own experience. Thus, that a person feels a desire to find Jesus again this year and begins to beg, to ask Our Lady to help her find and learn more about Jesus of Nazareth, is not a given, because we all see how removed we are from what Fr. Giussani witnessed: Who among us reacted as he did in front of Jesus's question? It is striking that in the last phase of his life, in front of the whole Church, Fr. Giussani witnessed to something truly striking, by saying about himself from the very first words of the book, "What is man that You should keep him in mind, mortal man that You care for him?" No question in life ever struck me like this one" (*Generating Traces*, p. ix). If we pay attention to this witness, we begin to see the distance between how we read these words from the Psalms and how Fr. Giussani understood them. Did Fr. Giussani perhaps exaggerate, was he being sentimental, while we are the realists? The distance between how those words echoed in him and what we perceive in reading them is immense. This also applies to the next sentence of the book: "What would it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and then lose himself? [...] I was never asked a question that took my breath away so much as this question of Christ's!" He is not saying trivial things. Is it an exaggeration? How about when he says, "No woman ever heard another voice speak of her son with such an original tenderness and unquestionable valuing of the fruit of her womb, with such a wholly positive affirmation of its destiny [...] And more than that, no man can feel his own dignity and absolute value affirmed far beyond all his achievements" (p. ix). I could go on. If we make the comparison between how each of us has trembled before these things and what Fr. Giussani witnessed to, we understand what an opportunity we have to participate in the grace that comes to us through him and that we are all called to participate in his way of looking at everything. It would be enough for you to make this comparison with the way you perceive yourself when you go to work, where everyone treats you according to your ability to succeed and look at you according to a particular measure. What prevails in us? The look of others or the look of Fr. Giussani? If the attitude witnessed to by Fr. Giussani doesn't penetrate into our depths, Christianity remains outside our lives and it is not experienced. Christianity can penetrate our lives, however — this is the promise of the School of Community. That is why questions immediately arise.

In the first point of the Introduction: "What would it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and then lose himself?" ...

Fortunately, the Introduction didn't go unnoticed! Unfortunately many of the contributions we received overlooked it without blinking an eye, but the Introduction is crucial.

Fr. Giussani says that this question is the answer to the question that struck him most: "What is man that You should keep him in mind, mortal man that You care for him?" I wanted to understand why.

Why does Fr. Giussani answer the first question with another question? If we don't understand this, it means that we haven't understood what is inside the first question. Let us leave your query open and see whether slowly, during the School of Community, we will grasp the answer that lies within this second question.

After last summer's work on experience, at Beginning Day some of us were struck by hearing it referred to Christ, to the relationship with the Mystery, which can be experienced. The story of Mary Magdalene hit the mark as never before. As you said last time, the Gospel begins to speak. The question we had as we worked on the text was this: "How is it possible to truly experience the

Mystery as Mary Magdalene did?” In reading the new book of School of Community, I was struck by the fact that Fr. Giussani’s famous speech in St. Peter’s Square (as you said) began to answer this question for me. For the first time, I understood that this is not a text to study intellectually because Fr. Giussani is describing his own experience of Christ. What is his experience? The discovery that that man, Jesus of Nazareth, was the only one to engage his question, his need for meaning (“What is man that You should keep him in mind, mortal man that You care for him?”), his drama. I intuited that one doesn’t experience Christ, unless one recognizes Him as the response to his own drama, to his own need. This is not so obvious — we who have been in the movement for a long time often reduce ourselves (perhaps without realizing it and not out of malice) to being part of an association, and we don’t go beyond that point. Instead, we need to be loyal to our own needs, to go all the way to the core of our own drama, to love our own humanity — even its petty aspects — because this is the only condition for recognizing Christ’s incredible newness and experiencing it as something unique and therefore wanted and sought, not endured or taken for granted, so much so that we wouldn’t exchange anything in the world for Him. It seems to me that your emphasis at the last School of Community on our humanity was aimed in this direction. This may seem a little thing, but I am happy with this discovery that has arisen in the course of my present work with some friends.

Why am I highlighting this? Because, as we can see, the contributions so far reveal a reduction, taking something for granted. What prevents us from reducing the School of Community to words, to something abstract or something from the past, so that we aren’t surprised by the first question: “What is man that You should keep him in mind, mortal man that You care for him?” (p. ix)? Who among us this week looked at this question with amazement? Who, when he prayed the Angelus, was astonished by the grace of being able to realize that that announcement was addressed to himself as he was in his nothingness? The content of the question, in fact, is a full, totally positive affirmation of our destiny. Do you understand? We repeat the sentences in the book one after the other — adhering, by all means — but without amazement, without feeling our heart tremble. It is as if they didn’t touch the deepest parts of our life, so the perception we have of ourselves is the same everyone has: if things go well, if we are in a good mood, if we do the right things, and if others treat us well, we are happy; otherwise we are down in the dumps. In this situation, it becomes immediately clear who is controlled by nihilism and who instead is beginning to realize that Christianity is not a religious thought or a feeling, but rather an event, an event in which one participates. It isn’t that the Mystery had no other method of making itself known. Fr. Giussani writes that, “As a way of communicating Himself to man, God could have chosen direct enlightenment” — as we sometimes say, “If I perceived Him within me ...” — but he warns us that “this would have been by no means an easier and safer road, since it would be constantly exposed to the fluctuation of feelings and thoughts.” Therefore, he concludes, “the way God chose to save us is an event, not our thoughts!” (p. 9), our feelings, our moods. Let’s see if this corresponds to our humanity. Who has experienced this?

I have lived the last two weeks trying to manage everything the best way I could (work, friendships, boyfriend, secretariat, etc.). I have said to myself, “This is done, check, this is done, check, and that is done too ...”

See how one slips, shifts, without even blinking, in the name of having things to do?

Exactly. But the more I did, the more I was lost.

The more you did, the more you were lost.

My attempt was even good: I wanted to respond to every request or need in the best possible way, not wanting to overlook anything. But “what would it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and

then lose himself?” (p. ix). I felt that I wasn’t happy, yet I kept chugging along, not understanding why I felt that way. On Sunday, even Mass had become the last thing to accomplish at 10:00 at night. Then a call from a friend made me realize what was happening: “How are you? Where are you? What are you preferring within all these things you are doing, to do?” This stopped me in my tracks, and I acknowledged the truth of the question. Among the tons of things I was doing, in the end I wasn’t preferring or choosing anything for myself; I was just running from one task to the next! As a result, I was losing myself. But where had I gotten lost? What allows me to live everything I have to do with gusto so that they can help me discover myself? At that moment the faces of my housemates came to mind, people through whom, mysteriously, I live every day something that is exceptional, as Fr. Giussani describes what can be define as “exceptional”: “When it corresponds adequately to the heart’s original expectations, however confused and hazy one’s awareness of it may be” (p. 7). That’s it! From that I began again in a truly concrete way. Monday night I cancelled all my appointments so that I could go back to and have dinner at the apartment, because without that place I don’t know myself; that is, I am not aware of the ultimate and deepest desires of my heart, which propel and motivate me during the day and make me enjoy what I do, my work, even the most boring things. The companionship of my housemates is the event, as Fr. Giussani describes it; “It is an event — the breaking in of something new — that gives rise to a process whereby the self begins to become aware of [...] the destiny towards which it is heading, aware of the journey it is making” (p. 9). Thus, I find myself depending on this place, and if for the world and also for some of my friends this is a sign of fragility, for me (it is paradoxical) it is the starter motor of everything I have to do, because it gives me back myself, redefining the purpose for which I choose to do everything.

“The more I did, the more I was lost”: this summarizes well the situation. “As a result I was losing myself.” We immediately realize when we identify Christianity with one of its possible reductions from the outcome it produces in us: the loss of ourselves. Christianity is not its reductions! We can verify in every moment whether what we live is Christianity or not: “Christianity is an event. There is no other word to indicate its nature, neither the word *law*, nor the words *ideology*, *concept*, or *plan*. Christianity is not a religious doctrine, a series of moral laws [which I must fulfill], a collection of rites. Christianity is a fact [...] All the rest is a consequence” (p. 9). In our own experience we can see first hand that as soon as we move even an inch away from what Christianity is — an event — we immediately notice the effect this causes in us: we get lost. The more we do, the more we lose ourselves. What makes it possible to start over? Where can one begin from? From a fact, as you have told us: “My housemates through whom, mysteriously, I live every day something that is exceptional.” This corresponds to you, and not because they are the answer, but because your housemates continually refer you to the Mystery and make His exceptionality present. A person writes me from far away, “During the last meeting of our School of Community group, as we were working on the point ‘For the salvation of man,’ I stated that after the coming of Christ 2,000 years ago, every day is a sequence of events. Not everyone agreed, and more than one person believed that there was only one event, while all the otherevents are mere facts, things happening, and that therefore the paragraph in question [cited above] refers only to the event of the birth of Christ, the historical moment of that birth.” Do you see? In saying this, we have already reduced the event. It is true that there is only one event, the event of that birth, but that event — as we repeated to each other for two years during the School of Community on *Why the Church?* (here we have the test of two entire years of School of Community!) — remains, continues in history. In this regard, I would like to bring your attention to a very enlightening passage by Fr. Giussani: “The event of Christ [which began two thousand years ago] becomes present ‘now’ in

the phenomenon of a different humanity: a man runs into it and recognizes in it a new presentiment of life.” We all began from there. Fr. Giussani continues, “The initial phenomenon — the impact with a different humanity, the wonder born of it — is destined to be the initial and original phenomenon of every moment of development” (*Dalla Fede il Metodo [From faith the method]*, Tracce-Quaderni 2, Coop. Ed. Nuovo Mondo, Milan 1994, p. 39, supplement to *Tracce-Litterae Communionis*, April 1994; also in “Something That Comes First,” *Tracce*, no. 11, 2008). If the initial event doesn’t happen again and again, Christianity becomes something of the past. Christianity is an event, and if the event doesn’t remain contemporary it is impossible to overcome our nihilism. In fact, when the event doesn’t happen again we are lost; when it does, we begin again. Another person writes me, “I started the journey again after so many years in which my heart had stopped asking. I understand well the ‘emptiness of meaning’ of which Galimberti speaks — it is a danger facing all of us, myself included. I had been in the movement for years, but even if I was participating in its gestures, I experienced this ‘emptiness of meaning’ and lived my days ‘tossed around like a pebble, swept away by the torrent of life.’ Then I had an encounter that highlighted my need and the great dissatisfaction I was feeling. It happened at a precise moment, in a precise place, with a precise face.” She wrote about the encounter and added, “This was the point of my beginning again. I was reborn at 37 while going to pick up my daughters at the Parish Center, exactly as I was reborn 20 years ago on a terrace in La Thuile during a GS vacation. The School of Community [quoting Alain Finkielkraut] says that ‘we need to give back to the event its ontological dimension of a *new beginning*.’ (p. 10) [A person can begin by running into a presence, and can, after having left, find it again unexpectedly, coming across someone who sets her back in motion. A presence is not something that remains in the past.] If this new beginning didn’t set a process in motion, if it didn’t make me get up in the morning asking for it to happen again every day, I would be stopping at a fact from the past [she recognized this in her experience!], at a past encounter. This happening again becomes the daily method by which Christ reaches me, otherwise my days are lost.” In the beginning — Fr. Giussani always taught us — we were given the method of every beginning. It isn’t like there is an event at the beginning but then we can walk alone without needing it to happen again. No. “The initial phenomenon [...] is destined to be the initial and original phenomenon of every moment of development.” We often lose this method along the way, but when the encounter happens, as we heard, it starts a process that makes a question arise.

This question came up in our School of Community group: “How can we live according to the event and not according to our thoughts?”

This question arises because the encounter, as we can see, doesn’t cause a change by magic, but rather starts a process in which many accidents can happen along the way. That is why it is normal for this question to arise. A number of people who have expressed difficulties of this kind: “I recognize the beginning, but then I realize that I live a division between what I think, between what I have recognized, and everyday life. What does it mean to recognize Christ in the simplest aspects of everyday life?” Another person expresses a similar difficulty speaking of a sense of emptiness, as if life ran on two parallel tracks; she experienced a moment of “explosion,” but then she fell into a track that doesn’t allow her to experience the newness of the beginning and on which she feels a sense of suffocation, of rebellion. At this point she has to be content to continue her journey on the track of a sad life in her work, relationships, marriage, etc. For others, the difficulty is about the simplicity and the ease of recognizing Christ, of which Giussani speaks, “It seems to me that I don’t have this simplicity and ease in recognizing Him.”

What does it mean to begin this process again?

In the last weekly School of Community with my friends, this conclusion was reached: “Andrew and John are all of us, because if we are here, something happened in our past as happened to them on that day.” Yet, honestly, this statement isn’t enough for me, I am missing a piece, I need something now. I cannot rely only on the big or small encounter I had a long time ago. What has struck me about John’s Gospel is when he describes the fact that many came from all parts of Israel to see and hear John the Baptist, but then Giussani says that they were so “accustomed” to his way of speaking, they were so full of themselves, that they didn’t take notice of whom the Baptist pointed out that day on the banks of the Jordan. I realize that I am among these many people. In fact, every day I experience that incrustation of habit that surrounds me, of the “already known” that doesn’t allow me to be aware of what happens. I, like the Pharisees, never budge from my thoughts and opinions, convinced that nothing really exists for me now. What is it that I don’t know by now? Life is punctuated by the same things: the School of Community, done cyclically on the same texts alternating over time, the Fraternity Exercises, the retreats, the Food Collection, the Traces magazines purchased out of devotion and never opened. Every day I am on the banks of the Jordan without moving a step, without even trying to turn my gaze. Where am I, then? I am sick and tired of “rock-steady affirmations” and “things to do,” as our friend said at your last School of Community. I want myself back and I want this wound of mine not to be my grave, but rather be a new beginning, when God wills it. Help me understand what is the point from which I can begin again.

The point to begin again is where the event happens again, recognizing it when it happens again. That is why we must pay attention. This is the big issue: that I realize what is happening. As you said, so many times what is missing — as Fr. Giussani often repeated to us — is not the event, but it is us! “Where am I, then?” you said. What does the event generate? What does the event mean? Fr. Giussani explains this to us in the very pages on which we are working. The Christian event “is a fact that reveals the self to itself” (p. 9). What does it mean that it reveals the self to itself? That man is himself; “To say that man is ‘saved’ means that he recognizes who he is, he recognizes his destiny and knows how to direct his steps towards it” (ibid.). Therefore, there is not only an affirmation of one’s self-awareness, but also the beginning of an understanding of what destiny is and of what steps need to be taken toward it. He repeats this four times. In the encounter “the self begins to become aware of itself, aware of the destiny towards which it is heading, aware of the journey it is making” (p. 9). And again, the event “posits itself as the method chosen by God to reveal man to himself, to awaken him to a definitive clarity regarding the factors that constitute him, to open him up to recognize his destiny and to sustain him on the journey towards it” (p. 10). It is not something static, but a fact that sets my “I” in motion: “God became an event in our daily existence, so that our ‘I’ might recognize itself with clarity in its original factors and attain its destiny, be saved” (ibid). What did the first two, John and Andrew, do the day after they met Him? They went to look for Him, and then they went back to look for Him again and again, every day, because “the journey requires the engagement of the person who is struck by the event, and will eventually reveal the true meaning of what he or she has begun to glimpse: it is the development of a way of looking at things” (p. 11). It is like when one meets someone who is significant person for him. After it happens, he doesn’t stay at home doing nothing. That something happened to him shows because he moves toward what he wants. What happens if this is missing? Life comes to a standstill. But when something happens that makes the “I” a protagonist again, everything is set back in motion, as happened to a friend, who wrote me, “I met the movement at the university, but after years, I decided to abandon it. A very dramatic personal event had happened to me; I blamed

God and decided to go another way, until something happened: while I was at work, I had a drop in blood pressure that scared me a lot. The diagnosis was stress, anxiety. The problem was that it wasn't going away, and my fear grew and anxiety kept tightening my chest to the point that the billions of dinners I had spent with my university friends came to mind. In thinking of this, I could recognize the origin of this fear and anxiety. I remembered it, it was no longer unknown: it was a desire to live, to be happy, that note from Chopin that, like a hammer, never leaves you. Then the fear disappeared. Having thrown everything away, I was no longer able to recognize it. The next day I woke up at dawn with that 'hammer' stuck in my chest and I rushed to see the dawn [again something that sets him in motion]. As soon as the sun was about to rise, at dawn, words came out of my mouth that I hadn't said since my university days: 'Before the break of daylight, / we fervently keep vigil' [words that perhaps we too have repeated this week but without blinking an eye]. What I had thrown away was returning all of a sudden. I spent the whole day looking for Jesus like a madman. Then, with the same impetus I sought the movement. I needed friends to embrace me, to help me see Christ present in every second: alone I would have died. I found them. Galimberti said that the solution is the 'golden mean' of the Greeks. A reasonable balance is good for nothing! The golden mean doesn't correspond to us, but neither does the other extreme; that is, doing crazy things in order to forget oneself. Only He corresponds to us!" But why does one come back after throwing everything away? Why did he look for Jesus like a madman all day long? Because, as the School of Community says, "insofar as an event is important you cannot retreat from it" (p. 10) no matter what happens. Sometimes it is precisely the challenges that we have to face that highlight what has happened to us.

How can a man have everything and in a few seconds have nothing left? Feeling like that all of a sudden is a huge blow; it hurts. I speak on behalf of the entire small community of the island of Pellestrina, where we were all victims of the catastrophe that hit Venice. In that awful, unexpected moment, I was going back and forth between my house and that of my parents. I saw the tide rising more and more, but I said to myself, "For us this is normal." In any case, however, as I was walking past many houses I prayed to Our Lady, whose miraculous image is present on the island. Yet something was wrong, wasn't normal. All of a sudden a wave of water submerged the island with terrible force. I found myself on the street in the dark, with water up to my chest. In an instant, all my certainty left me, and my cry prevailed, "But why?!" I wondered, "Does it all end here, is this my need, is this what determines me?" I said to myself, "Raise your eyes and look at those eyes and their way of looking, of which you are made that are made of the substance which makes everything." Even if this doesn't take away the pain, I thank you because you, the community, the Fraternity, my friends, my father, and my family are the silent but powerful forces that allow me to demolish that "But why?!" I cannot deny that the Mystery is always here and accompanies me. At the moment when the big wave struck, my daughter was alone with her grandfather, trying to shore up the door with only the strength of their arms and with water up to their stomachs in the dark. After the panic left her, she told me, "You know, Dad, I was there just with grandpa, we didn't say anything, then we started to pray the Hail Mary to ask Our Lady to help us, and it worked, she listened to us, because — believe me — I was afraid of dying." I don't know what to say, but I know that my relationship with Him succeeds victoriously over everything thanks to this humanity which is able to keep me living life in a true and different way. The whole world called me afterward, a people who prayed and prays for us. Believe me, this is fuel for our heart and what breaks down that "But why?"

Only when we see Him victorious, whatever the challenge we must face, can we truly gain the certainty we need to face reality. Yet, at the same time we can reach this point only if we engage in a verification; otherwise, a person couldn't say what we have just heard: "I know that my relationship with Him succeeds victoriously over everything thanks to this humanity which is able to keep me living life in a true and different way." This is the newness that Christ introduces into our lives, into our self-awareness, that enables us to stand erect before everything. This is why it is crucial to realize what happens.

I would like to share with you what struck me during our last School of Community. I will only relate a couple of contributions. A friend told us of a difficult day during which she was very tired, until at a certain point she spoke by phone with a friend, a mother who has had ALS for some years. At a certain point in the conversation this woman said to her, "We must say thank you, the Lord is so good to me." Suddenly our friend experienced the correspondence of her heart with such an exceptional gaze on reality that it freed her, revealing to her her true desire. Another friend, who met CL in college, said that her cousin, who had always been against the movement, agreed to have lunch with a friend from hers from the movement. After the lunch, her cousin called her, amazed and grateful, and told her that it was an exceptional meeting and that she wanted to go to School of Community so as not to lose what she had seen in that friend. Seeing her cousin, who had always been against the movement, so interested, our friend wondered, "When during this week was my heart magnetized like that?" There have been other similar contributions, seemingly disproportionate and yet, those facts revealed the self to itself, not only for those who offered them. They talked about facts that represented, says the School of Community, "the breaking in of something new — that gives rise to a process whereby the self begins to become aware of itself, aware of the journey it is making" (p. 9). While people were speaking, I realized that what I had before my eyes was of the same nature as the "notes" contained in that first chapter of the Gospel of Saint John. In the School of Community, Fr. Giussani wonders, "How could the first two, John and Andrew [...], have been won over at once and recognize Him? ("We have found the Messiah.") There is an apparent disproportion between the extremely simple way it all happened and the certainty of the two [...] recognizing that man [...] in His unique and unparalleled ("divine") value, must have been easy. [...] Because He was exceptional beyond compare [...] an unimagined, unimaginable correspondence to the heart" (pp. 6–7). That's it! What I saw in front of me was exactly the same. The text adds, "It is, in any case, an experience to be had. This journey requires the engagement of the person who is struck by the event, and will eventually reveal the true meaning of what he or she has begun to glimpse: it is a development of a way of looking at things" (pp. 10–11). On this journey of my way of looking at things I am becoming more and more aware of how decisive this guided companionship is for me: I see this in the fact that an "awareness striving to discover that 'God is all in all'" (p. xi) — as Fr. Giussani witnesses to us in the Introduction — grows in me. I see that this tension grows in me, even in my lack of fidelity, in that lack of fidelity which, as Fr. Giussani says, "always arises in our hearts even before the most beautiful things" (p. xi). Yet, that tension grows. I speak of a guided companionship, because the generation I see happening is possible because there is a father who makes me aware that the crucial point is to meet Christ in the present! The movement generates me, reawakening my attention to what is happening, and so I recognize the paternity in my life: you are with me even when you are not physically with me because you put back before my eyes, never giving up, the breathtaking question, "What would it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and then lose himself?" And so, reawakening my religious sense and therefore my tension toward

recognizing Him, all reality speaks to me. Today I understand more what you have said to us so many times; that is, that authority is within the experience we live.

It is so true that authority is within the experience we are living that it is what wins us over, as it won over John and Andrew! How could the first two be won over at once?

It happened because they found themselves in front of an authority, an unparalleled exceptionality. One must have this experience personally, and in front of that [unparalleled exceptionality and authority] one cannot fail to engage and commit one's entire humanity. This is the event: a fact that reawakens our "I" so much that it doesn't allow us to stay on the sidelines, but sets us in motion, setting us on a "journey in our way of looking at things," educating us every day to recognize His exceptionality everywhere, like we saw this evening. This is the promise that the School of Community we have just begun makes to each of us. It is not simply a matter of going over a text, nor of learning certain concepts, but of having the same experience as John and Andrew and those who met Him, of reliving "what happened to them in the beginning: not 'how' it happened in the beginning, but 'what' happened in the beginning: the impact with a different humanity that renews the same event that moved them originally" (*Dalla Fede il Metodo* [From faith the method], op. cit., p. 42, and "Something that Comes First," *Traces*, no. 11, 2008). Otherwise Christianity would only be a fact of the past and would be of no interest for our lives today. Fr. Giussani gives us a simple criterion for verifying whether we recognize Him: "What shows us that this acknowledgement is true is the fact that life [lived this way] has an ultimate, tenacious capacity for gladness" (p. x).

The next School of Community will be held on Wednesday, December 18th, at 9:00 p.m.

We will continue to work on the book *Generating Traces*. This month we will work on points 3, 4, 5, and 6 (pp. 11–20) of the first chapter.

Please note that on the CL website, in the School of Community section, you can find the audio files (in Italian) of the parts we are working on.

Furthermore, on November 23–24, Rizzoli will renew the special offer of the e-book (Italian version) of *Generating Traces* at a cost of only €2.99.

Traces. In our conversation with the regional leaders of the movement about the experience they had with the extraordinary distribution of *Traces*, what emerged first of all was the opportunity for many who were involved to become aware of what we are communicating and the possibility of sharing it through the magazine. For many it meant start to read *Traces* again. It is surprising how many have witnessed that the last people to join us have a great interest in the magazine, while we sometimes don't read it. Some people initially felt a distance between the communication of life contained in *Traces* and the School of Community, but then realized that everything is united, that what the magazine proposes is an experience, which provided us with an even stronger reason to think about ways of implementing the gesture of distributing it. *Traces* isn't simply a piece of paper, but a tool for sharing the experience we live. What also emerged is a rediscovery of the missionary dimension as a normal factor of experience, not as an extra thing to do. This allowed us to experience Traces Day not as a burden, but as something to celebrate. Some made a comparison with the Food Collection, observing that the collection is an easier gesture because it is rare for someone to say that it is wrong to collect goods for the poor. Who doesn't recognize that? But this makes us aware of something that we have seen today: like everyone else we think

that something is reasonable when it responds to a need, but we often reduce the need. In fact, if a more material need is important, imagine how decisive is the immense need of people who are not aware of the meaning of life. In this sense, there are people who bought *Traces* because, in speaking with those who were proposing it, they found someone who responded to the level of their real need; that is, that life can have meaning.

This is the reason why we want to live also the gesture of the Food Collection — which will take place on Saturday, November 30th — with a greater awareness of our need and of the needs of those we meet.

As you can see, these gestures — if we live them with this awareness — are a fundamental help to our education, to an attitude that makes our whole humanity respond and come to life.

Christmas Poster. The image this year is a detail from the *Adoration of the Shepherds* by Caravaggio. The first quotation is from the well-known dialogue between the Unnamed and Cardinal Federigo from *The Betrothed* by Alessandro Manzoni, which we have mentioned often in recent times:

“As soon as the Unnamed entered the room, Federigo went to meet him with a calm and friendly expression, and arms outstretched, as if to welcome a guest; ‘There have been many times, over a long period, when I should have come to you.’

‘Come to me? Do you know who I am?’

Was my name given to you correctly?’

The Cardinal seized his hand with loving violence, saying, ‘Do not prevent me from clasping this hand.’

With these words he put his arms around the neck of the Unnamed, who at first tried to draw away, and resisted for a moment; but then he seemed to be overcome by that impulse of divine charity and threw his arms around the Cardinal. The Unnamed freed himself from that embrace and said, ‘O truly great and truly merciful God! Now I know myself, now I understand what I am!’

‘You must not think,’ he said, ‘that I shall be satisfied with this single visit of yours for today. You will come back, won’t you?’

‘Do you ask if I will come back?’ replied the Unnamed. ‘If you turn me from your door, I shall wait outside as obstinately as any beggar. I need to talk to you! I need to hear your voice and see your face! I need you!’”

Alessandro Manzoni, *The Betrothed*

The second is from Fr. Giussani in *Generating Traces*:

“The Christian event has the form of an encounter with a physical, bodily reality, one made of time and space. It is the encounter [as we have seen] with a present, living, wholly human reality, whose exhaustive meaning is that of being a visible sign of Christ’s presence, God-made-man within the precariousness of a human form. This encounter is what continually orients our life, imparting meaning and synthesis to our existence. Without it, there is no source of awareness of life’s newness.”

Luigi Giussani

The Christmas Poster is an opportunity to remember and give testimony to what is dear to us.

Fundraising. We all know the dramatic situation that many areas of Italy — above all Venice as we have just heard from our friend from Pellestrina — found themselves facing due to the recent wave of bad weather. We all feel a desire to help the affected populations and, even more, to respond to the needs of our friends who have been affected by it. For this reason, the Fraternity of CL, which treasures the experience of these years, continually proposes to everyone the essential gesture of the common fund. This is our first gesture to help one another; everyone, through what he gives, contributes to the need of everyone else, and those in need know that they can ask the Fraternity for help. In the specific case of our Venetian friends, the Fraternity has already committed itself to supporting them adequately.

Best wishes for your work on the text.

Veni Sancte Spiritus.