

Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, April 7, 2020

Reference text: L. Giussani, S. Alberto, and J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen's University Press, pp. 46–53.

Good evening everyone. Let's start with a prayer, asking Our Lady for special help for many of our friends and relatives who are sick. We also entrust to Her all our dear ones who have died in our communities and in our families.

Hail Mary / Glory Be / Veni Sancte Spiritus

This evening we decided to do School of Community by video link, each staying in his own home because of the health emergency. It is only an attempt, and I hope that everything will go smoothly. We hope that everyone has been able to connect and can follow the meeting.

At a certain point in the path of the School of Community having the theme, "*The event goes on in history*," something unexpected happened: the coronavirus sneaked into our journey. It is an unexpected event that is challenging us all. We are all called to verify the soundness of the statement that the Christian event endures in the face of the challenges of living, not in theoretical terms, but in our own experience. We are therefore all faced with this big question: Does the event of Christ endure in history? Thinking about what we are going through now, where do we see it happening?

You have just reminded us that the chapter we are working on speaks of the church, of our companionship, and states very simply and clearly its value: our companionship is the face of Christ, the manifestation of Christ; it is the place where we meet Christ. At the origin of the companionship there is an event: "The belonging to the companionship [...] springs from an event" (p. 51). What does this raise for me? First of all, together with the beauty that I see in our communities, in the Fraternity groups, and in the Schools of Community, there are also some difficulties. It seems to me that sometimes these difficulties arise from the idea, unspoken but present, that even though the unity among us grows and deepens, this can only happen after a series of questions, problems, and difficulties is resolved. A new person arrives (do we take him in or not?), tense relationships need to be improved, some relationships are difficult, people's personalities clash. Each of us can add to this list. There is a temptation to believe that the event of Christ can only shine through if we first "fix" our relationships. You often remind us that "the method is always the method of the beginning" and that it never changes, but the temptation to change the method is strong. Why? At the beginning there is an attraction, there is the beauty of Christ that you meet through the faces of the companionship, through the movement; then you take a step back and begin thinking that the only way to proceed is by obeying an order, a rule, or an arrangement we create. It is as if we believe that the beauty of the beginning is reborn through a balance or harmony generated by us originating in our ability to fix relationships and various problems. My question is: Why do we change the method, why do we take a step back? What prevents us from maintaining the position we had at the beginning? Is it a moral issue? Is it a

matter of distraction, of carelessness? In short, why do we devolve from an event into an organization?

I think that this question that you had raised before the coronavirus spread affects us all at every moment in our lives but even more at this moment. It is an issue that seems crucial to me, because it marks the passage from the first to the second chapter of *Generating Traces*. As you said, the event generates an attraction, but then, over time, it appears that this attraction declines and therefore an effort on our part is needed to “fix” things, that the step represented by the first chapter did not last and so we had to work hard on fixing our relationships. We have to deal with this situation, because if already in the transition from the first chapter to the second we run off the road, imagine the challenges that we must face now! Thus, the question you ask is decisive—we have to check whether our attempt at fixing things can generate the initial unity that fascinated us but that we have lost. We consistently see that our efforts end up falling short. So let us ask ourselves: Where do we see reoccurring the attraction of an event that we cannot replace with our own attempts? Only by answering this question can we verify whether the event endures or not.

Starting from our work on the School of Community, I have realized that often during the day I recall the phrase, “The companionship of the believers is the effective sign of Christ’s salvation for men; it is the sacrament of the world’s salvation” (p . 30). This phrase provoked me in a particular way because, on the one hand, it doesn’t leave room for me to cheat: I either have this experience of salvation very concretely or I don’t; there is no getting around it. On the other hand, it touches on a point that is particularly dear to me. I finished the university a few months ago and my relationship with “the companionship of the believers” has changed, making more urgent my need to rediscover the truth of Fr. Giussani’s claim. I want to tell you what I found out. One morning I received two very positive and unexpected pieces of news about my work, but I went into my study and started working without care, indeed with a certain aversion and hostility, disengaging from everything around me. In this state of mind I received a call from my girlfriend. I replied with great annoyance at having been discovered in this state and felt great sorrow in recognizing that I am unable to be myself both in front of myself and in front of the people I love most, even if that’s what I want. When I put the phone down the first thing that came to my mind was that the problem was my relationship with her, that I had to fix this relationship, but this thought didn’t last for more than a second because it was evident from our phone call that I had no resources to somehow fix myself or her. It is here, in front of the question, “So who saves me?” that the phrase from the School of Community I mentioned broke out in all its provocativeness, causing me to ask myself whether the companionship of the believers is truly the effective sign of Christ’s salvation for men. A dear friend of mine with whom I shared my years in CLU had invited me to dinner at her apartment for that evening. I went, with my wound and with the provocation of the School of Community. Dinner was very simple, so much so that I thought to myself: How can this be Christ’s salvation for men? However, without having any great speeches to deliver, I stayed there and watched. During the evening, which was so simple, my final resistance to being saved by someone other than me came out. This resistance showed itself when, after dinner, my friend asked me how I was doing. I started to answer her as if I had to resolve my wound with what I said. That is, I wanted to skip the event, replacing it with my reasoning. Yet, the more I tried to do so, the more my friend’s presence became oddly authoritative; even if she was silent and listening to me, the fact that she was there before my eyes was a call not to cheat on my heart, not

to be satisfied with my thoughts, so much so that at some point, I said to myself with annoyance, "I think I am cheating!" The first surprise was that, by admitting to myself that I still needed to be won over by the event, I smiled for the first time in the whole evening, feeling like I had been freed from a burden. I was finally breathing. After running away from myself for the entire day, the first miracle happened in her presence: being able to face my need to be conquered by Christ (and not by myself) without running away or finding other ways to deal with this need through my own efforts. Her presence changed from being a nuisance to being a gesture of tenderness toward me—it was not her tenderness, but came through her. Because I was so liberated in front of my friend, in recounting my afternoon and the details of my difficulty and my wound, it was natural to say that I had been alone all afternoon. Yet, this wasn't true, because while I was working another student was present. From this apparently banal detail, it became clear to me that not just any relationship or just being in the same room with someone is a companionship that saves. In fact, the authoritativeness of my friend's presence was not hers but came from her past experience of daily life in the university, which allowed me to experience that evening what Fr. Giussani meant by that phrase.

If we aren't able—it is important that we realize this—to fix even our relationships with our loved one, imagine the rest! When an event that captivates us occurs, we don't need to replace it immediately with reasoning; it is enough that we simply surrender to the evidence of having been conquered by Christ. Yet, as you rightly said, not all relationships manage to conquer us, not all of them have the authoritativeness (you have used this very word) necessary to conquer us. That is why I insist that we must always start from our experience. Where does this experience happen?

I have been struck by the unity of the first and second chapters of the School of Community. I was impressed by the phrase, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (p. 31). Although I have heard this many times, I realized (and the realization has stayed with me) that I don't live the companionship with an awareness of the meaning of that phrase. In the second chapter I read, "It is this Man who makes my life capable of companionship [...], grasping me and drawing me into Himself, by assimilating me into His personality and making me become a member of His body, through the action of His Spirit" (pp. 34–35). A few months ago our diaconia had a very simple dinner with a priest. I was very struck because in the absolute normalcy of that dinner I was able to see a person totally taken over by Christ. I realized that his presence immediately generated a new unity among us: there were no formalities, no sense of being foreign to each other. I was able to see what the School of Community says about the link with the event: when one is taken by Christ, a real communion is generated around him and everyone can be grateful for what is happening. I am also being provoked a lot by my small Fraternity group: we have been together for 30 years, and two of us have died in recent years. These deaths have helped us rediscover a deep friendship, have brought out all the need that we are, and have changed our relationships; above all making evident the fact that we are a gift to each other. I thought back to your insistence in the letter you sent to the Fraternity in early January on virginity, which is something I have always struggled to understand. I am slowly beginning to realize that virginity is the true position for living the companionship, because you recognize that the other is given to you. It enables you to participate in the event and the companionship instead of worrying about how to manage them (I think this extends also to my responsibility in the community and my job as a principal). I can

participate in a beauty that is given to me in total gratuitousness. I think I just have to safeguard this—there isn't much else to do.

It always amazes me how, when you all talk about your experience, you cause something to emerge that we find in the text of the School of Community, thus making your experience precious for all of us. The previous contribution said that not all relationships manage to generate unity and this shows us the failure of our attempt to fix things. Now you have mentioned the phrase. “Why are you persecuting me?” which you had heard so many times, confessing that you had never lived the companionship with that awareness of its meaning. Where have you seen this this unity happen? You mentioned a person, a priest friend, whose presence during that dinner immediately generated a unity. It wasn't you or those who were with you who generated this unity by your efforts. This amazes and is very precious to me because it documents first of all that the event remains only when it continues to be an event. It's not that the event was there at the beginning and then after it happened we manage it or fix things. It isn't like that, so much so that when you see it happen, you—whether we're talking about the small Fraternity group or the entire community—don't worry about managing it, but only about following it. This is amazing, because it evidences how the event continues on. How does Fr. Giussani put in front of our eyes his own following, carried out in a unique way, the way in which the Mystery does things, which we in turn discover? He says that the companionship has a law of generation that is fundamental to recognize (as you did) as it springs forth: “The event of this organism that God awakened to be the rallying point and the horizon in the world the point of departure and the final aim of everything, has a law of generation, which is also the law of its development,” of its persistence. What is the law governing this organism? “The law of choice or election” (pp. 36–37). This law passes through a person who is not decided by us in advance, but is rather someone He chooses: the chosen person is the mediator, one “who makes everything in [his] sphere all for Christ” (p. 41) and generates a unity that surprises, like that generated by the priest friend. The fulfillment of this need for unity that we all have is made possible, says Fr. Giussani, by the man who is chosen, by the man called—he makes it possible that we become one with others by the grace of an event. “It is this Man who makes my life capable of companionship,” it is He who makes it happen. How? “By grasping me and drawing me into Himself, by assimilating me into His personality” (p. 34) using whomever He wants. We don't decide how this happens—we can only follow it when we see it happening. Otherwise, as we go from the first to the second chapter of *Generating Traces*, we change the method, deciding on our own the modality of the permanence of the event. No! It is always He who happens, according to the carnal, historical, specific modality that He chooses.

In reading your text on solitude (“Faith and Solitude,” Traces, no.2 /2020), I understood better what we talked about at the last School of Community; that is, that there are two ways of living darkness and loneliness. After a burdensome and difficult period caused by my work, physical ailments, and especially by the exacerbation of certain tensions in a relationship with a loved one, I found myself totally exposed in my fragility and weakness—I experienced a few moments of solitude in which failure, error, and contradiction really seemed to be the last word on life. The most terrible thought that arose in those moments was, “Christ has been victorious in everything except in me.” When you told me that we need to work on the instruments of our thinking, learning to wield reason in all its breadth and power, I realized suddenly that I had on a previous occasion lived solitude, powerlessness, and darkness in another way, so much so that what you said sounded

familiar to me, yet I hadn't recalled and treasured it until you said those things to me. That positive way of experiencing darkness as an opportunity and provocation that could help my "I" to emerge had not yet become truly mine; it was not yet conscious in me as self-awareness. I became aware of this experience that I had already had and understood that it consists of the companionship of which Fr. Giussani speaks in the chapter of the School of Community on which we are now working. It is Christ, it is He who remains in history and in my life, personally and really, in a place, in very specific human faces and physiognomies, who makes me rediscover all the greatness of my "I," which again set my affection in motion and opened up reason. The companionship cannot go through darkness and loneliness in my place, yet without the companionship, without what my eyes see happening here, without your constant provocations and urgings, I would succumb to darkness. As we spoke, I also sensed that this possibility of not succumbing to darkness and meaninglessness is the greatest contribution I can make to the world; it is how I can truly accompany others. In certain moments of particular difficulty I thought, "I am here all stuck in myself and I am not making any contribution to the world and to my brothers and sisters." But then, hearing you speak, after my eyes opened again, I asked myself, "What does the world really need now, in a time when nihilism seems to be spreading and unstoppable?" I understood then that the greatest contribution to the world that I could make was to allow a presence to enter, thanks to which I could again say "I" even while in darkness, recognizing even that difficult circumstance as given by an Other, and thus conquering nothingness.

What you describe is like having prepared for the challenge of the coronavirus, the loneliness that we have had to face and the darkness that has spread in so many ways. That is why you, just like all of us, are not spared the path of knowledge you have described, in the same way that Jesus did not spare the disciples. A companionship among us that doesn't behave like Jesus is not a true companionship; in the end Jesus remains extraneous to our way of looking at life, which becomes incapable of defying the darkness that He has come to answer. Thus we see the deep meaning of what the School of Community says: the encounter with Christ has become "a real event" in Baptism. But what happened in Baptism? Nothing mechanical or isolated in a moment in time; rather, it was a beginning, an event in which Christ, "like a *vir pugnator* set off an 'invasion' of our existence" (p. 46). How can we understand the depth and historical significance of Baptism? "You begin to understand it in a living Christian companionship [pay attention to the adjective]" (p. 47), because without this "living" Christian companionship that reawakens in us the memory of the initial event and helps us recognize it in its richness, we can't in the end help but remain in darkness or stuck in the circumstances of life. Therefore Baptism, through a living Christian companionship, "makes you realize that life is a battle for affirming Christ" (p. 47).

I would like to share my experience of these days, when reality is shaking us up. Some coworkers and friends are sick or have lost family members. People are losing their lives. In everyday life, we are afraid and worried for ourselves and for our parents and relatives, some of us more than others. Yet, the current reality doesn't shake us only for this reason. It shakes us because it provokes questions of the heart, the ultimate questions of the heart that we cannot avoid and that ultimately put faith at the center of our attention. It has been my experience that the virus and the circumstances of this moment cause us to question everything. I am particularly struck when I hear about the days of struggle and battle, of a true war, of people who are fighting for their lives, and of others (doctors and nurses) who are struggling to save them. We often use these terms ("struggle," "battle," and "war") to characterize our daily circumstances at work and even sometimes concerning our families and relationships with our children. But in my life the real

battle began only when I said my first yes to a certain companionship; only that yes transformed my life into combat, made every moment after the first encounter a battle (as did all my subsequent yeses and nos). The battle is for the affirmation of Christ! I can't find any other words. This is my daily battle in these days at home with my loved ones, on the phone with friends, and in video calls with my coworkers. I must acknowledge that this is what inevitably emerges in everything I do now. It isn't an effort. I don't do anything. I can only decide when I realize that this is the nature of the battle, to make room for his Presence in my life. The other day I was speaking to a coworker on one of the thousand video calls I have had in these days, and at some point she asked me a simple question, a question we often ask each other even under normal conditions, "How are you?" I began to answer her, "I am well" (How could I answer otherwise?) when she exclaimed, "Stop! It is useless for you to go on. I get it. I can see that your awareness brings a good, a good for you and for everyone around you, even at work." I was taken aback, surprised, because it was clearer to her than to me what was happening and what happens every day of my life: I cannot, not even if I wanted to, define the event; rather, I am defined by it. It is the event and my relationship with Christ that define me in the way He chooses and that determine my life today. Every time I said yes in my life I really lived; what happens when I don't say yes isn't real living. It is real life because I let Him take over. This is a certainty in my life, but it doesn't take away, doesn't eliminate, the drama present in the circumstances. Yet there is one thing that in this certainty is most evident to me: only faith allows me to live like a man, with ultimate joy in facing every aspect of reality, whether good or bad. That is what is happening to me even in the face of the epidemic. Only faith that affects the present can pull me out of nothingness. This is the great challenge that I am living through in these days: to experience the relevance of my relationship with Christ to the needs of my life in every circumstance. That is why I thank you and the companionship of the movement I have met, because you support my reason, my heart, and my faith.

This is what we see expressed in the School of Community: "The blossoming of an exceptional humanity is part of the dynamics that generates the new companionship that is the Church. Christ calls some so that all may become aware of His event" (p. 43). This happened to you without your even realizing it, and your coworker testified of it to you. This is the dynamics that generates, even if at times it seems to us an injustice: "He calls everyone [...] but by means of a method that gets one person after another involved with Him" (ibid.). "'Chosen' [...] This term indicates the foundation of everything" (p. 44), says Fr. Giussani, that is, the fact that He, by calling us, brings out a human difference, "an unimaginable human presence" (p. 43).

In the work of the past few weeks in our small group of School of Community, a question has emerged that we would like to ask you, so you can help us take this step seriously. How can we recognize the scope of this being chosen, sent? We immediately take it to the next step—How do I live this being chosen?—but the first step is having an awareness of being one with the Father. Does this awareness and kneeling before this recognition allow me to become more and more familiar with Him?

It is very easy to recognize the difference that those who have been chosen carry with them—even outsiders notice it, as we heard a moment ago. In fact, He makes us understand whom He has chosen so as to introduce us to battle and to a flourishing of life before our eyes. So, it is enough to pay attention and recognize the people whom God chooses to reach us.

“The Mystery of God [...] vibrates [...] in human preference, because human preference is the shadow of God’s choice of freedom” (p. 45). I felt dizzy when I read these words, and I immediately asked myself whether Fr. Giussani is speaking of any human preference here, or just the choice that God makes when calling someone in his church. This question made me live my relationships with more attention and care, even those in which I am struggling right now. I realized first of all that I experience the separation between the sacred and the profane as limiting; that is, as a difference between Christian preference and human preference! Because my heart is one, my person is one and the reality that I live is one. So I started looking at everything, at all of my experience, beginning from the relationships of which I am most certain. One Saturday morning more than a month ago, my day began with breakfast with a friend of mine after a bad night in which I had been sick. We talked about what we care about most, what challenges us the most with a correspondence to the heart that allows me to find myself again, to feel freed. There was a moment when I literally felt pulled out of nothingness, called by name, loved by Someone who knows me very well. So, in her presence I went over the words of the School of Community, which for me were real at that moment, at that breakfast, in that bar: “There was nothingness, the nothingness of everything, but more precisely your nothingness, my nothingness. The word ‘election’ sets the limit, the boundary, between nothingness and being. Being blossoms out of nothingness, as a choice, as election. There is no other condition that can be proposed, no other premise imaginable. This choice, this election, is the pure freedom of the Mystery of God in action, the absolute freedom of the Mystery that expresses itself” (p. 45). I told her, with tears in my eyes, that for me at that moment she was the face of the Mystery who, by choosing me, pulled me out of nothingness. What about my relationships in which the correspondence isn’t so obvious? If a preference pulls me out of myself and makes me more myself; that is, makes me alive and present to myself, that is a good for me and for the whole world! That doesn’t happen when I carry on a relationship by looking only for my gratification or pleasure. In that kind of relationship, I close myself, resting on a feeling rather than on the truth. It is too little! In fact, after a while it becomes suffocating, which causes me to feel a desire to live friendships in a true way; that is, desiring that my destiny and that of the other person be fulfilled.

When an event — like the one you have described — awakens us from the nothingness we usually inhabit, we immediately see the difference, and at that moment we truly understand Fr. Giussani’s words, “There was nothingness, the nothingness of everything, [...] your nothingness, my nothingness. The word ‘election’ sets the limit, the boundary, between nothingness and being. Being blossoms out of nothingness, as a choice, as election” (p. 45). What makes the difference between being and nothingness is precisely this election, which we existentially recognize when what you described happens. You don’t decide when it happens—you can only intercept it when it happens. At that point, all our freedom is in play: we can decide to follow this modality through which the Mystery has chosen, in his freedom, to pull us out of nothingness, or we can seek our own gratification. In order to meet us, the Mystery made use of a particular grace; that is, the charism given to Fr. Giussani—we recognize it because of the attraction it exerts on us and the liberation from nothingness that operates in our lives! Everyone has the opportunity to recognize it, to intercept it, as all of you witness in what you write as you face the challenge of the coronavirus. One person wrote to me, “Without the charism of the movement my family and I could not live this circumstance like men but rather would live like slaves.” Why is this decisive?

Because the Mystery wants to respond to the most urgent need we have at this precise moment. Which need?

There is a passage in the School of Community that I cannot understand or even conceive of: “There is nothing more deceptive than the will to stay on one’s own or to be alone. For in solitude man is badly off, he refuses himself. Only if the presence of another is a dimension of life, then, even though it may not be more fulfilled, at least one lives life, one accepts it” (p. 34). It is this last word that I can’t understand: someone who helps me accept life (who says, “Well, at least you are religious”) is not enough for me. Someone who simply keeps me company is not enough. Instead, I would like Someone who gave meaning to this loneliness and in this way helped me find meaning in everything I do. I ask you to help me understand or at least identify where I am wrong.

No, you are not wrong! Precisely because solitude has rekindled this urge for meaning in you, it is possible for you to find—if you pay attention—that Someone who gives meaning to everything, where and when He is present. Finding him, as Fr. Giussani says, is not a problem of intelligence, but of attention. That is why I don’t want to answer you theoretically, but rather want to put you in front of how He makes this happen.

Last Monday morning I woke up early and in a moment of awareness said to myself, “I really don’t lack anything I need in order to live.” Not even the virus and the quarantine can prevent me from recognizing the light that illuminates my days. For me, your article in the Corriere della Sera and your letter to the Fraternity were real events, like a whirlwind that swept away the tragic sense of this dramatic situation. After reading these, I was unable to look at anything that happened in general or directly to me as anything other than a mysterious opportunity for conversion. With the closing of the schools I started video conference lessons and now something amazing happens every morning. In one of the first weeks, there were some proposals in discussions among colleagues to change the schedule. So I asked one of my classes if it would be a problem to move the lesson from early morning to the afternoon if necessary. A student immediately replied, “No, please! I want to have your class first, because it motivates me for the rest of the day!” One cannot but think of the words of the School of Community, “Our self belongs to this ‘Body,’ which is the Christian companionship, and from this it draws the ultimate criterion for tackling everything. Only this companionship, therefore, enables us to face reality, makes us touch reality and makes us real” (p. 50). This is true not only for my students but also for me, who every day needs to enter into a dialogue with Him who “like the dawn [...] tinges the horizon with light” (p. 49), first of all inside of me: “This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith” (ibid). This is the companionship I need, a presence that pushes me to live: “Life takes on a new meaning and a new unity. [...] Only in the experience of this cohesion does there begin to dawn upon the horizon of our awareness the perception of a positive meaning of time, in spite of everything; in other words, of something greater and more powerful than evil and stronger than the narrowness of the present” (p. 51).

Just as that student had found the meaning of his life—so much so that he told the teacher to keep the lesson at the first hour because it offers him meaning and motivation for the day—so can we intercept it if we pay attention to how the Mystery meets us in our lives. This is what we are seeing in the hospitals during the time of the virus, where the struggle for meaning emerges in all its power. This doesn’t only happen to others, but also to us through others.

I want to relate to you a very simple episode that happened to me in these days of very intense work in the hospital. Yesterday, during one of my few breaks, I had a chat with a colleague. We work in two different reanimation wards, and he wanted to share this thoughts with me. He went right to the point, saying that in this intense and difficult period he could clearly see that I was sustained by a certainty that he called faith. He used exactly these words! I was blown away, first because I didn't expect this from him and, second, because I didn't notice anything different about me—I was only focused on my work and therefore relegating Christ to morning prayer without recognizing him as the One who sustains my whole day; without Him, in fact, the idea of getting up every morning to go into the midst of death and suffering would be impossible. My prayer now is that I be given the same fresh outlook that will enable me to glimpse Him in this difficult reality. If someone thought about this possibility by looking at me, I want to it to see it too!

It amazes me that what interests your colleague is finding what can sustain his life when he is at work. You were worried about your job performance; instead, what interested him in you is what supports you from within: a certainty. This is striking because it reflects what Fr. Giussani says in these precious chapters of the School of Community; that is, that the task of one who is called is “to introduce mankind into a definitive relationship with the Mystery of God” (p. 45), which means to introduce others to a familiarity with Christ. This is what your colleague needs most and therefore he pays attention to those who are supported by a certainty, even if they were strangers. He discovers it in you because of how you work. He doesn't need to seek that certainty first among people who go to church—it is enough for him to recognize it among those with whom he works, and it is there that he sees Christ persisting as a present event. This is impressive because in recognizing someone who has this certainty, he gives it back to you, to us. You rightly ask in prayer that you would have the freshness of your colleague's outlook, but you don't realize that it has already invaded your life, so much so that the other notices it and makes you recognize it. God gives you someone who, with his outlook, with his awareness, gives you back that freshness, so that you too become aware of it, you who communicated it to him.

In light of the experience of this month, full of events that I am not going to talk about, which has been given to us in an unimaginable way, I take note above all of the poverty and helplessness that have been generated in me. All I could do was hold fast to your letter to the Fraternity. The letter seemed to me, right from the start, your humble offering of an experience necessary to be able to live. I understood that this paternity is not owed to me—I understood this also on the occasion of your re-election as president of the Fraternity—and that this paternity is part of my relationship with the Mystery. I realized how much the self-awareness you are talking about isn't a given. The letter blew me away from the first page when it spoke of the need to “live the real intensely.” It isa phrase that I have heard a thousand times, but in recent days I have come to understand that this intensity must be welcomed. As the tenth chapter of The Religious Sense says, “It is a passivity which makes up my original activity of receiving, taking note, recognizing” (L. Giussani, The Religious Sense, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997, p. 101),. In the daily difficulty of holding up in the midst of what is happening in this period, I am beginning to realize that the irruption of the Mystery into our lives takes away the inevitable “vulgarity,” Pasolini talks about in the Easter poster! It is a consistently surprising experience, always “other,” because it speaks to us of something else, of the difference of another, of the strength of another, but also of another's

tenderness. It is his tenderness that most strikes me about God, his desire to make himself known to us, to us poor wretches, in spite of everything. He gives me being again now. For this reason I have begun to be moved by the question you proposed, “What saves us from nothingness?” On this journey I have also begun to understand more the phrase in the School of Community that you have repeated to us many times in recent months: “When an encounter is all-embracing, it becomes the shape, not only the sphere, of relationships” (p. 20). Living in this situation, I have seen that the encounter as the sphere of relationships only feeds the abundant and often useless discussions of these days (often via social media or text messages), while the encounter as the shape of everything helps you live, gives shape to what you are asked to experience, whatever it may be. On this journey, the significance of my yes has been deepened every day and every hour. I am beginning to understand that it is both a dizzying and unique yes because I am not made up of the ideas I have of myself, but rather am the present event of His initiative with me. I would like some help, Julián, to go deeper into this: what is the content for you of the yes you ask of us in the letter?

The content of our yes is emerging this evening in a very simple way: in the way others recognize it in us and tell us about it. We often live distractedly, but others see the value of our yes as they meet it in our lives, and show us how much seeing our yes sustains them. For this reason, my yes is like all of yours, in the conditions of course in which God has placed each of us. Some, like our friend who is a doctor, must say it in a hospital ward, another at school, another in the family. I must say it at home. The circumstances in which we are placed don't decide the value of each person's yes, don't diminish its value, because it is in these circumstances that the Mystery calls us to respond. How the Mystery will use this yes is his problem. Our responsibility is to answer with this yes, because it is the way in which He makes it a good for all. I was struck in reading the book of the month dedicated to the story of Cardinal Van Thuan (T. Gutiérrez de Cabiedes, *Van Thuan: Libero tra le sbarre [Van Thuan: Free behind bars]*, Citta` Nuova, Rome 2018). Despite the fact that the Mystery allowed him to be forced to give up everything, isolated (just as we are now so often isolated), stripped of everything, nothing could prevent his yes to Christ from becoming powerful enough to change the guards watching over him, so much so that they had to rotate them constantly—this is how he continued his mission. All the potential of his yes, a yes that at first seemed useless to him because it did not allow him to be useful to the world in the way he had in mind, was enhanced. The Mystery had chosen another way to show him what his usefulness was.

To clarify what this usefulness consists of, I conclude by reading the letter of a 16-year-old girl who, because she has health problems, is even more isolated from everyone and everything than most of us. Listen to what she wrote to an adult who follows the students in GS [Student Youth] in her city:

“The arrival of the pandemic has locked me up at home. Like everyone else, I have suffered from the lack of everything, but for me there was something more at stake. With my illness, if I get the virus, I could die. This is something real. I believe that only my experience of these years and my friendship with you [she writes to her friend] have kept me from falling apart. So, even though trapped by fear, I have tried every day to live everything seriously, but my prayer has remained a request: that all this may end soon. You say you have neglected us. I say that even if what you are doing is not with us, you are with us more powerfully than before [a 16-year-old girl wrote this!]. *Something greater* has made itself known in the simplest way possible; that is, by making happen events that have gradually filled my heart, which is otherwise sick with fear, with a strange joy: it is O/one [with a capital and lower case “o” for the same word] who has the power to free me from

anguish because He wants to make me breathe life, the life that is present even now and that I have seen in all of you. I know this because before I often stayed home so as to not risk dying, to not lose my breath. Now I am home to live, yes, to live. I stay home not to defend myself from a threat; rather, home is the place where I look forward to being reached by real life. Everything has changed, from the way I live distance learning to the way I look at friends. “Yes, because He is here.” Listening to your stories, seeing your posts on social media, how many times I have wished I could be there, but immediately thought that I cannot expose myself [to the risk of the coronavirus due to her illness]. Yet, I never got angry or sad because I was enjoying what I saw happening in you. Living this new situation with the same outlook as always has been difficult but not impossible. Difficult because it isn’t enough to repeat positive words. Not impossible because it only needs to happen again, and today it has happened again. The real joy is in giving one’s life for the work of Another and the first work is on me, who has allowed my humanity to be nourished by the only One who can do it.”

This is how Christ becomes present again and remains in history. This is what we are celebrating now, remembering the yes that changed the world. We apparently celebrate a defeat; initially no one understood why he gave up his life, not even his disciples, but nobody was able to distract him from following the Father’s plan. Why? Because Jesus knew that only if a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies can it bear fruit. This is our yes. This is what we celebrate on Holy Thursday and Good Friday, waiting to see the fruit of His resurrection in the life of each of us. We have the opportunity—especially right now—to identify ourselves even more with Him, following a design that is not ours, and to give ourselves to Him in silence. I repeat—according to a design that is not ours—for the good of all. I hope that Holy Week is not perceived as somehow “less” this year because we are forced to celebrate it in an unusual way. Instead, we should take advantage of this situation to identify ourselves more with the yes of Christ, who was and truly is the salvation of the world.

Obviously, since we are not able to participate in the usual gestures of Holy Week, the suggestion is to follow, through the various media, the celebrations presided over by the pope.

We also suggest taking advantage of the opportunity to go over, with our families, the texts of the booklet that Fr. Giussani has always proposed to help us live Holy Week, which is available on the CL website in PDF format.

May the essentiality of the proposal we make be an opportunity for each of us to go to the core of what we really need to live. Let us not be distracted by other things and instead identify ourselves with the One who this year calls us to live Holy Week in these unusual conditions. The Mystery has not been distracted and we must therefore not fill these days with our own bright ideas! The easiest way to follow the Mystery is to follow the modalities proposed by the church and the movement.

Especially this year, Holy Week is a unique opportunity to bring the experience of silence alive in us, as Fr. Giussani intended: “Silence [...] is not nothing, silence is a prayer, it is awareness of being before God, [...] it is an entreaty” (L. Giussani, *La Convenienza Umana della Fede* [The human relevance of faith], Bur, Milan 2018, pp. 212–13).

Common fund. In these dramatic days we all feel the desire to help people, including financially, with their present and future needs. As I have already had occasion to write to you, Fr. Giussani educated us to conceive of and live every detail being aware of its connection to the whole and of a communal understanding of what we possess. Therefore, I ask you to consider with great

seriousness the commitment of the Common Fund, so that the Fraternity can meet, to the extent possible and taking into account all the factors involved, the various needs that are emerging and will emerge.

Communication of announcements of the movement. A new web platform and a special app (downloadable on cell phones) for the purpose of communicating announcements from the central office of the movement have been created. Beginning in mid-April this will be the only way in which national and regional announcements will be communicated in Italy.

Traces and communication tools. *Traces*, the website, and the social networks of the movement are precious tools—as we see clearly in these times—that accompany us on our daily journey. Much of their content can be shared with friends, coworkers, relatives, etc., which is especially convenient at this time.

Since this year we don't have the opportunity to subscribe to or renew subscriptions to *Traces* during the Spiritual Exercises, I remind you that subscribing to the magazine is a way of supporting all of the movement's communication activities. For this reason, a special subscription campaign will be launched in the coming days.

The next School of Community will be on Wednesday, May 6, at 9:00 pm, in a format that we will communicate to you based on the evolution of the health emergency.

We will continue to work on *Generating Traces*, going over over point 5 (“A NEW CONCEPTION OF INTELLIGENCE AND AFFECTION”) and point 6 (“A NEW MORALITY”) of the text.

These points are particularly pertinent to the journey we are on in this challenging situation. Anyone wishing to send their contribution about their experience and questions on these points can write to the usual address: sdccarron@comunioneliberazione.org

I send you my greetings wishing all of you and your loved ones a joyful Easter.
Greetings to everyone!