

Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, May 6, 2020

Reference text: L. Giussani, S. Alberto, and J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010, "A New Conception of Intelligence and Affection," point 5, pp. 53–56, and "A New Morality," point 6, pp. 56-67.

- La Guerra [The war]

Glory Be

Hello everyone! Often in the newspapers this time of the pandemic has been called "suspended," but the more than four hundred emails we have received as contributions for this School of Community say that, among us, it hasn't exactly been a "suspended" time, because every circumstance becomes part of the adventure of living. There is a phrase of Fr. Giussani's that comes back to my mind frequently in these weeks: "The truth of our faith is demonstrated precisely by the capacity of each of us [...] to valorize what appears to be an obstacle [...] or a difficulty, as a road to maturity, by the capacity to make it an instrument and a moment of maturation" (*The Long March to Maturity*, Traces, no. 3/2008, p. 19).

How can we tell if the present circumstance has become for each of us an opportunity to mature? We often tell each other that without a judgment there is no experience, but only a series of initiatives that make no difference, that is, they don't make us grow—it is the nature of experience, in fact, that it makes the person grow. The overturning of reality caused by the coronavirus has triggered in us all kinds of reactions. Faced with this challenge, we gave ourselves as a working hypothesis for facing it the concept that Fr. Giussani has of religiosity. We all remember this sentence in the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense*: "What is the formula for the journey to the ultimate meaning of reality? Living the real. [...] The only condition for being truly and faithfully religious [...] is to live always the real intensely." *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997, p. 108). I still remember the amazement I felt the first time I found myself faced with this concept of religiosity: one doesn't become more religious by performing ever more religious acts separated from life, but by living the real intensely! It was shocking for me. I had entered the seminary as a kid—imagine if I hadn't performed religious acts—and those words challenged my very conception of religiosity!

For this reason, since the beginning of this challenge we have invited each other to compare ourselves with the charism that was given to Fr. Giussani. Everyone can see the verification he has carried out. In many contributions that have arrived, people talk of a proliferation of online initiatives (Whatsapp, messages, videos, Zoom meetings of all kinds) by which we have been besieged in one way or another. Each of us has been able to evaluate their effectiveness with respect to the essentiality of the charism's proposal—"To live the real intensely." Have all those initiatives helped us live the real or were they shortcuts to avoid reality? Often, juxtaposing "religious" acts lived formalistically with an underlying rationalism prevails, creating a sort of dualism: rationalistic in our way of facing reality with an added patina of "religious" acts. With its unexpected overturning of reality, the coronavirus blew away this dualism and challenged all of us. The current situation allows us to verify the "new knowledge" of which the School of Community speaks. We are all in front of the same provocation and each of us has seen in himself an attitude, a way of being in reality—in isolation or in a crowded home, in the face of smart-

working or in the presence of one's children—each of us has experienced whether and how he has recognized the new knowledge of which Father Giussani speaks: “To become a ‘new creature’ means having a new awareness, a capacity for looking at and understanding reality” that becomes the “normal consciousness in the ‘new creature’ with which it passes through the whole web of circumstances that comprise reality” (p. 53).

So let's begin the journey this evening. How have we discovered and been surprised by this new knowledge in the way we have dealt with a circumstance that affects us all?

The first thing I am coming to understand is that what I am, the true truth of me, coincides more and more with belonging to this companionship, to the movement, the particular form of the church that has come to meet me. This realization is a certainty of which I am becoming fully aware in these days, when the struggle with my claim to being independent has become more radical and more easily exposed. I will relate to you what has made this clearer to me. I am living my quarantine at home with my mom, my dad, and my younger sister. My mother is like a caged lion; my dad is more balanced. In front of my parents, the people who gave me life, I have had a deeper hope that can no longer be uprooted. It is clear to me that this hope that is so deeply rooted in me doesn't come from the education I received in my family and not from me. Even with my particular personality and all my limitations, I have a certainty that in the face of an uncertain future, a potentially more difficult reality, that makes me sure that a good will still exist. Realizing that this certainty doesn't originate in me, I asked myself where it comes from. The answer is that it comes from the continuous work of these past years, in which you have accompanied us in recognizing Christ in reality; this rock-solid certainty has accumulated, layer by layer, like a sedimentary rock. This is the first discovery: a certainty greater than me has grown and is growing in me as a result of my continuous belonging to this companionship; it is the certainty that reality is positive because it is inhabited by a Presence that loves me. The second discovery has given birth to a question: I study medicine and in this period I feel particularly called upon, I feel in my heart, a deep desire to give everything, driven by the fact that Jesus gave everything for us when he made the greatest sacrifice. Sacrifice is a theme that intrigues me because I often perceive it as renunciation; this annoys me because I don't want to give up anything. The events of these recent days have made me realize more clearly that I am happier when I am serving others. In fact, some things that have happened at home have helped me realize that I am happier when I give myself for my family. On my first day at the switchboard of a call center set up by my region to provide information on the virus, staffed in part by medical students, I was struck to see that at the end of my shift I was happy and so were the others around me, even those I didn't know. Not only me, but every person, is made to serve! My question arises from this desire to give everything. I sense that giving everything has to do with sacrifice, but there is still some resistance in me. How can you live like Jesus, docile and obedient to the Father in sacrificing himself, in giving his life after being betrayed?

The first thing that amazes me about what you say is the surprise of finding in yourself a different way of being in the complex of circumstances of which the School of Community speaks, both at home and working for the call center. You were so impressed that you asked yourself a question about where this comes from. The first thing you did was to make an observation that this “new knowledge” was not the result of your effort, that you didn't have to generate it. It was a surprise: one finds this newness in himself in belonging to a companionship like ours; he feels generated,

and with this awareness he faces reality. As Fr. Giussani says, this becomes the “normal consciousness [...] with which [we pass] through the whole web of circumstances that comprise reality.” You caught yourself facing circumstances differently. At the same time, what surprised you? That you were happier when you served. Why, then, do you worry about sacrifice, about your resistance to it? It is simply a matter of following that desire to serve that you have begun to savor, without having to make a particular effort. Why do this? Because you are happier, because it has revealed itself before your eyes as a “more” of human intensity, of human beauty, so much so that you recognized it in others when you saw it. For this reason, by following the place that was given to you by Christ to generate you, your willingness to sacrifice will grow in you and you will be surprised, as the beginning of the School of Community says, by your capacity for adhesion—as you have seen—and of a dedication to reality of which you were previously unaware. As you continue on this path, the rest will also come.

On April 3rd, in the midst of a full-blown pandemic, my sixth daughter was born. Congratulations!

Thank you. This fact has magnified the provocation that these weeks have represented for me. The visits to the hospital, the uncertainty, the difficulty in organizing the care of my other children, the fear of the virus—all of these things weighed on me, often leaving me full of worry. We are at home now and are well, but observing myself in these weeks brings up many questions relating to the School of Community. Point 5 speaks of the new creature and the gaze it has on things, but I still see myself as very immature, very “of the world” in comparison to the gaze described there. Mostly I judge, as the text says, according to “I like it, I don’t like it” or “It is difficult, it isn’t difficult.” In contrast, the text describes the new knowledge like this: “I go beyond, to the root of the face of things and reach the point in which the thing is an Other who makes it, the You who makes it, Christ” (p. 56). Yet this is not the criterion of my judgment. In particular, on days when I feel most fearful for myself and for my children, I rebel against the idea that things are not under my control, and I try to reorganize life so that I can be back at the helm. Then of course I can’t, but I also can’t stop thinking otherwise. At the same time, there are many signs that something new has happened in my life; for example, all the doctors in the hospital who were surprised that we have six children (although I am not exactly an ideal housewife) and the nurses who came into my room and said to me, “It is nice to be here with you because you are always smiling.” I am amazed at this newness and I wonder, “How are these two things fitting together, the fact of thinking and living like everyone else most of the time and at the same time realizing that there is already a newness that has taken hold of my life despite my immaturity?”

The first thing I can tell you is the elation I feel when I see that someone is recognizing something, because it is not common. Many times we relate things to each other without realizing what is happening, while you have recognized that your criterion of judgment is not the one suggested by the School of Community—this in itself is a step of awareness. The second thing is that you have begun to realize that, even if it isn’t yet your criterion of judgment in all aspects of living, there is already a newness that has taken hold of your life despite your immaturity. This means that we are all—you and us—on a journey. There is always a journey to make, along which we begin to see that a new shoot continues to bloom. That is enough for us, just as you are surprised at this blooming in you of a newness that amazes you. Yet this only happens if we follow God’s method as outlined in the School of Community: “Christ [...], like a *vir pugnatur*, set off an “invasion” of

our existence” (p. 46), began this battle in us to introduce us to the experience of this newness and will continue to make you bloom for your own good and for the good of your six children, of your husband, and of all of us.

How does this knowledge, mentioned by the person who spoke first, which has surprised our friend, arise?

I wanted to understand the connection between event and memory. In Generating Traces in the History of the World, on which we are working, Fr. Giussani often speaks of memory. In the first chapter he devotes a section of point eight to it. He writes, “Memory” indicates the historical depth of an encounter, as far back as the root from which it ultimately started” (p. 27). He returns to it in the second chapter when speaking of Baptism, “Even those who are chosen can drown in the muddy ocean of the world, yielding to forgetfulness, not living the memory that is the awareness of Christ’s presence, a real Event in the life of man” (p. 49). Also, in the point we are working on, he talks about memory: “In memory, the event that I experience in all its wealth becomes immersed in the flow of time and space, it is part of a history” (p. 67). I wonder, especially in these days of great silence for me and of change in my daily activities, what it means to remember, without reducing it to mental gymnastics, to which we might reserve a moment of silence in our days. And above all, how does memory not replace the contemporaneity of an Event, the emotion experienced by Peter in front of a Presence that was questioning him? In short, what is the relationship between memory and an event that is happening here and now?

As we have seen, “new knowledge” arises from an event; this is the beginning of a memory with which we can face everything. In the first contribution this emerged very clearly, albeit in other words: by belonging to a place like the movement, our friend is helped to recognize Christ, the “rock-solid certainty accumulated, layer by layer, like a sedimentary rock” that is shaping her person, just as familiarity with Jesus meant that Peter was slowly filled with this memory. This didn’t, however, always prevent him from making mistakes like everyone else, but when he was challenged by Jesus—“Do you also want to leave?”— what emerged in him was the memory of everything he had seen: “Master, to whom shall we go? You alone have words that explain life” (Cf. Jn 6:68). As you can see, event and memory interact constantly, as the text you quoted says, “In memory, the event that I experience in all its wealth becomes immersed in the flow of time and space, it is part of a history” (p. 67), and I find it inside me as I face new situations. As we said at the beginning, I begin to face the complex of circumstances with a new “normal consciousness,” which is being generated in us. That is why it is more difficult, if one is aware of his deep belonging, to reduce memory to “mental gymnastics.” Mental gymnastics are not able to make us stand before the challenges we are experiencing. More than explanations, it is the provocation of reality that allows us to verify whether our memory is mental gymnastics or an awareness of a present event.

Having had to suspend my academic activity as a biblical scholar, for a month I have devoted my time to serving as a chaplain in a hospital, assisting Covid-19 patients. In this time, my reason and my affection have been challenged by a problem of knowledge: what is suffering, what is death, what is life? Every day I have to face these questions in front of the sick who are suffering and dying. Never as in these days have I understood, within the path I would like to relate to you,

what the School of Community says in the following words: “The new creature has a new mens [...], a capacity for knowing reality that is different from everyone else’s,” and also what the text indicates as the origin of this new knowledge: “adherence to an event” (p. 53). The hospital doesn’t spare you anything, you can’t take your eyes off of it as we are all faced with suffering and death. Here is the problem of knowledge that we all must face. An analytical look at reality, toward which I find myself constantly pulled, seems to lead to the conclusion that everything ends up in nothingness, that we are only physics and chemistry, that the only laws of life are those that determine the path of the virus: the laws of science. There is no good design and we are the result of chance—everyone seems to look at reality in this way, even if they may not express themselves in these words. Given this conclusion, the rest is nothing but poetry, even what is called “religion”: a beautiful but absurd consolation for those who remain. The result? I must confess it: I drown. Why? You always told us, “Are you drowning? You drown because you are a positivist.” That is, “You don’t really know reality, you are missing some factors.” So, I began to perform a work of reason in the hospital, the same work Jesus forced his disciples to perform; for example, on the boat when they had forgotten the loaves of bread. It is the work of a reason emotionally engaged in front of an event, not of a reason left alone with its thoughts to attempt an unattainable analysis of all the factors involved. This is what it means to “take an event as a starting point for thought” (p. 53). If I were asked, “Whom have you known in these years? What has entered your life? Who has drawn your reason and affection? Do you want to reduce all this to nothing?” certainly I could say that I have met and known the Mystery of God made flesh. The One who supports me in being at this moment entered history and I met Him. After acknowledging this, I begin to breathe. Certainly not because of a miraculous sentimental input in to my mind, but because of a journey of reason that returns to recognizing something that exists! A journey that wouldn’t be possible without the contemporaneity of a face, that of Christ, which is the “instrument of a work not all lost in pure intuition in solitude” (P.P. Pasolini). Then I realize the lie of that analytical gaze on reality that seems to conclude that everything ends up in nothingness. In the School of Community, Fr. Giussani is very clear in identifying this lie: “The dominant mentality, [...] when judging, always tends to subsume the particulars into an abstract universal” (p. 54). The abstract universal is the judgment of universal reason, the death and decay of everything. According to this mentality, the particular historical event of Jesus does not have the ability to explain a universal problem of reason, such as death. But it’s not true! When I enter the hospital, this new event that has changed history enters with me. A new knowledge of the problem that everyone must face—suffering and death—enters. The first thing I am surprised about is that the event of Jesus opens up my reason, in at least two ways. First of all, it allows me to know that prior to the fact of death there is surprise at the fact of being. We cannot conclude that everything is nothing! To say that everything is nothing is a lie of the common mentality. Of course, we are a contingent reality, but man is precisely that level of nature in which he “experiences himself as contingent”; that is, “he subsists by means of something else, because he does not make himself by himself,” as we learned in the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense* (p. 106). How much has this chapter accompanied me, been a real help to working on the instrument of thought! Second, the event of Christ, which has reached me in my history, allows me to know the face of that Mystery that reason can intuit in the reality of things. Without this particular event I couldn’t have known Him. But I met Him! My knowledge came across Him in history. And now I enter the hospital with this newness of knowledge, and I can assure you, Julián, that in this historical situation, it is a knowledge more necessary than ever

because the sick are alone in their rooms, without husbands or wives or children. So, I can whisper in the ear of the seriously ill using the words of Fr. Giussani in the School of Community: “There is a relationship with the Mystery who makes all things, there is a relationship with the Mystery become flesh, become man, Jesus, that is immensely more human, more mine, more immediate, more tenacious, more tender, more unavoidable than the relationship with anyone else—with my mother, my father, my fiancée, my wife, my children [this sounds like the list of family members who cannot accompany the sick to the hospital!]—with everyone and with everything” (p. 56). Here is the newness that entered history through a particular event: I have a relationship with the Mystery who has become flesh that is more inevitable and tender than my relationship with my mother! He died and rose again, shining a new light on death, making possible a new knowledge. Thank you, Julián, for challenging me at this level, allowing me to make a human journey of gaining knowledge of reality! I can say with certainty that I have become more religious in these weeks, that I have come to know more the mystery of reality and Christ who sustains it.

This journey that you have made—and that needs to be looked at again slowly—is an opportunity for each of us to see what it means, existentially speaking, that a particular event in history represents the key to illuminating everything, because it has a universal claim to responding to the problem of living; the fact of having seen the risen Jesus (a particular event) claims to explain a universal problem of reason (in the case you mentioned, the problem of death, in front of which there is no escape). This particular event—the resurrection of Christ, which we are experiencing in this liturgical time—presents itself as the solution to problems like death. It makes a universal claim, but also a particular point. Why is what you have said to us fundamental? Because if we don’t offer each other examples by means of which we can see that only through a particular relationship can we live reality in a true way, we end up reducing everything to our own analyses. That is why it is so important to recognize as it happens, as was said before, that belonging generates a chance to look at what everyone is living with an intensity and density that others cannot manage to have. Not because we are visionaries, but because, by belonging to a place, we can look at everything differently. That is why I am interested in the fact that you recognize in the most banal episodes of life the origin of this new knowledge.

I wanted to tell you some things that happened to me with my daughter, who is almost four years old.

I like this talking about the relationship with your daughter! Something that seems to have nothing to do, apparently, with “new knowledge,” with faith. How did your relationship with your daughter introduce you to a more adequate view of reality? Tell us!

Certain episodes came to mind when I read the pages of the School of Community suggested for this meeting. At the beginning of the quarantine, my daughter appeared to be pretty calm. Then, about two weeks ago, somewhat suddenly, she told me that she wanted to go back to doing the beautiful things she did before, and she started to cry. The next day I took her to the parking lot of our apartment building to play and she asked me, “Mom, are you happy?” I answered yes and asked her if she was happy. She replied yes, that she is if I am there and she is with me. She says other important things; for example, she told me, “I am afraid when you are not here, mom; I will be afraid when you go back to work.” (I am a doctor; now I am on maternity leave, but I will go back to work soon.) When I read the part of the School of Community on morality, on the yes of Peter and on his relationship with Jesus, I immediately recalled these conversations with my

daughter: it is evident that she is totally taken hold of by a presence—that of her mother—to whom she can ask any question and the relationship with whom is unaffected by the possibility of evil that might occur in the future; it occurred to me when she said, “I am happy if I am with you,” or “I am afraid if you are not here.” Seeing her so full of longing and questions made me a little sad. I thought about the fact that every day I work hard so that we can do beautiful things together, yet evidently it isn’t enough for her; or better, the only thing she needs is love, a loving presence. It was clear to me how my starting point is my own ability (what I can or cannot do with my children) and my limits and not a relationship that “takes hold of everything,” as described in the School of Community, and how I was helped to notice this thanks also to some friends at our last small group of the School of Community, in which I told everyone about these conversations with her. Thanks for always helping me!

I am amazed at what you perceive in your daughter—not her being good, but her ability to know. What determines her relationship with reality? Your presence—a particular—which gives her a more adequate look at reality. Your daughter, all taken hold of by a presence—a particular event—solves a universal problem that we all have: happiness. That relationship defines her way of being in reality. If that detail—you—is missing, she is defined by fear. But we, despite having facts of this magnitude in front of us, don’t rejoice because they don’t introduce us to reality. In fact, you immediately chastised yourself because you are unable to get rid of that veil of sadness, while the most spectacular thing is to see what your daughter is telling you about this step in the School of Community: it is a real, historical, particular presence that introduces you to the totality of reality. It isn’t that your daughter analyzed the situation more keenly than you, but she perceived reality better by having you in front of her. Do you remember the example I gave years ago of the child in the amusement park? He is all excited when he is in the company of his parents and afraid when he is separated from them (like your daughter when she is separated from you). So, what is the true way to see reality? When the child is with the parents or when, being alone, he is entirely defined by fear? The true reality is what he sees—and what your daughter sees—when he is accompanied by a presence. It is what Fr. Giussani has before his eyes when he looks at everything: a Presence. So the question is to pay attention to what is happening. It struck me so much to read, in a press review put together by our friends in Madrid, the article by a Spanish writer, Jesús Montiel, who was fascinated, like you, by what he saw happening in his children. He writes, “My children never cease to amaze me. During the confinement they didn’t express a single complaint, unlike us adults. They can accept the situation because a child’s true normalcy is his family.” For Montiel it isn’t just a matter about the present situation, since he has already written a novel describing his son’s illness, about which he said, “I remember another longer quarantine in a hospital. My eldest child’s cancer forced us to live in the oncology ward for two years. He didn’t complain even in those circumstances, when he was two, three, and four years old. Those hairless children exhibited a scandalous docility; they weren’t restless. That disciplined attitude, so distant from the murmuring of adults, was an unforgettable lesson for me. Now I see that same acceptance again in him and in his brothers. It is incredible. It is an acceptance that is not conformism, but true adhesion,” that does not introduce anything extraneous into their outlook. In the same words your daughter uses, Montiel writes of his children, “You are enough for us, they say. And they say it without words, rather with the language of the wise: with their actions. Life is going back to this thousand-year-old wisdom that children show effortlessly, tuned in to the present that we neglect [which is why we immediately get anxious]. I am moved by my children these days, and sometimes

I cry in secret for everything they give me without asking for anything in return. They provide travel directions for my soul, which sometimes wanders, disoriented. Children, I believe, are proof that we are not made for projects, but for loving and being loved. Only in this way does the contingent situation [the challenges] make sense and the present not collapse” (*The Objective*, April 2, 2020).

With this in mind, we can now reread this passage from the School of Community: “The way in which the criterion for judging is born can be summed up in the word *gaze*. It is a matter of facing the event you have encountered without at some point compromising the sincerity of your eyes” (p. 54). What example does Fr. Giussani propose to make us understand what he is talking about? “A child before reality, who does not invent anything, and does not allow any other concern to enter into his gaze” (p. 55). Our way of looking at the event that we have encountered—specifically if we introduce extraneous concerns—would be enough to understand if we have severed our relationship with it. As soon as we stop having this position of the child, we begin to worry, while “it is sincerity in looking at the event that makes for growth” (p. 55). Who else has discovered this in their relationship with their children?

In the first days after the coronavirus forced us into the house, it was so evident that this circumstance was bigger than me, that I could only accept to make room for what was happening. Those were really rich and precious days. I learned to look at my children from another perspective. We kept each other company a lot. The children couldn't believe they had us all to themselves, day and night, without the usual rush of normal days. We have learned to enjoy our home, to be silent and to play together, to watch a good movie and to study. I was also struck by the fact that when my husband and I proposed it, my children immediately agreed to saying a decade of the Rosary together every evening so that we could entrust this special moment to Our Lady. In the meanwhile, time has passed and I, as often happens to me, have gotten used to this too. I started to put things in order according to my own ideas. What I initially saw happening had now become something I created, depending on how I felt this or that morning. I no longer left room for the Mystery. And I became sad. The days have become heavier. Then I read the School of Community, “‘Though living in the flesh,’” that is to say, in the situation as it is, “‘I live in the faith of the Son of God.’ [...] In other words, I belong to an Event, to an origin that changes the way I look at things” (p. 55). But why, if this is so evident, does my way of looking at things struggle so much to change? I am scandalized by the fact that the divine coincides with the ultimate consistency of reality, of man. I stop at my own limit. I don't adore my husband's face, but much more often I notice in him what I wish were different. Is it possible that to leave room for the Mystery and look at him at work I need a coronavirus to happen all the time?

What do your children teach you? Do they need the coronavirus, or their mother's presence?
Her presence.

It isn't the coronavirus that gives us this way of looking at things, which is something we will see it when we emerge from isolation. As was said before, only the reoccurrence of the event is able to make us continuously maintain this gaze instead of allowing it to falter. As you can see, at a certain point, we no longer leave room for the Mystery; that is, we detach ourselves from him, and then we begin to chastise ourselves; a veil of sadness appears because we are not the ones who can solve our children's problems (or our husband's or our own). The only possibility is that we allow ourselves to be constantly attracted—without allowing any other concern to enter into our focus—

by a presence that introduces a newness in us, as it introduces it into our children. The children remind us, as the Spanish writer says, what the true attitude is. It isn't a problem of moralism, of an effort to be made, but of our way of looking at things. "It is an *affectus*, such as Simon had, so purely and deeply filled with affection for Jesus, one that develops our capacity to judge reality adequately" (p. 55).

In the fifth point of the second chapter of the book I was struck by the following words, which are found immediately after Fr. Giussani explains what it means to look at the face of a girl according to the flesh. The text says, "Though living in the flesh, I live in faith," which means that I approach my relationship with her through faith in the Son of God, in my adherence to Christ. "So that girl, insofar as she is attractive, is the sign through which I am invited to adhere in the flesh to the being of things, to get down to the reality of things, right down to where they are made" (p. 55). These words fascinate me, like the famous page 108 of the tenth chapter of The Religious Sense that refers to "living the real intensely," so much so that often during these days I say to myself, "Today, tomorrow, I really want to see what it means to relate like that to my wife and to my children." Working at home remotely, I don't have many other possibilities in this period. So what happened in my days when I started with this good intention? In truth, little, I saw little of this intensity. I could say that I found myself having the experience of "living the real distractedly," forget the depth and everything else that the book explains so well! All caught up in the things I had to do, in all the emails to be read and sent and in conference calls, my days often slip away in a superficial way, and in the evening I find myself full of dryness and sadness, often angry with myself for having treated myself and everyone I met "distractedly." I ask myself, "But why? Why doesn't this attraction I feel for the words of the School of Community translate into an equally beautiful way of living that is adequate to my desire? Maybe because I don't really ask? Maybe because I stop a little too soon?" I really need some help with this.

What suggestion does the School of Community give you? The Mystery comes to find you, moves you to "live the real intensely." It is therefore a matter of accepting the provocation of reality through someone or something—for example in a phrase, as you said quoting the book, "I live in faith"—which the Mystery uses to knock on your door and pull you out of your distraction. It is not your good intentions that get you out of this situation, but following, as children do, the modality of being attracted by a presence. How much time do we waste by not following the way in which Fr. Giussani introduces us to reality! It is the modality we see in children and it is very easy! That is why I am interested in making us look at children, and Fr. Giussani invites us to recognize their value. We must not get angry because we are unable to overcome our dryness and sadness. If we were able to do it, we wouldn't need an Other! Therefore it is useless to complain; rather, we must learn what Jesus says: Only those who are like a child can enter into the kingdom of God, can participate in the newness that he has introduced into the world (cf. Mt 18: 1–5). Who has perceived this?

I will tell you briefly about the past few weeks. For me, the bar is always being raised higher! In these days I often think that I would like to be elsewhere: with my family (among other things, my grandchild was born a few days ago), with friends, or simply doing my own things. One morning, I woke up and realized that I had become defensive. But a different hypothesis has been introduced.

This is the point! You can get up being “defensive,” but the question is whether you let in “a different hypothesis.”

Or rather, a question about the reality that awaited me beyond the door of my room: What are you afraid of? Do you think that even here, even today, there cannot be something for you? What endless gratitude I have for this different outlook that is always offered to me as a possibility, for the fact that it entered my life. If today I want to live life with meaning, I have no other place to do this than in the circumstances that have been given to me. That day was no longer an effort, not a holding on until I could finally do what I wanted, even something good. It was a free life, full only of a desire and curiosity about what was there for me. I sense that something very precious for me is at stake. The worst thing that could happen to me is to start living by following my vision of things and no longer seeing reality. I wholeheartedly wish to be challenged by reality as it is without mitigating its impact. For example, I have been invited to a thousand calls, aperitifs, and remote virtual games with friends ... A little of this can be fun, but I prefer not to reduce the drama of experiencing a lack, a longing, and of letting them shake me deep down. The first grace I see in my life is the change in me; that is, being able to stay in front of the circumstances given to me. The second is that various entreaties arise in me, above all that I be open, not only to saying yes to doing certain things, but to have a deeper openness. An openness to really letting myself be asked, “Do you love me? Is there something you keep from Me because you are afraid that I could not be victorious there?” This ultimate openness, this morality, as the School of Community calls it, seems to me the most precious thing at stake for me. You have no idea how grateful I am for the fact that there is someone who continues to keep my desire for real life alive, everywhere and always, who wants me to live and continually deepens my way of looking at reality and continuously asks me in a thousand different ways, but always, ultimately, this question, “Do you love me? Do you want to be with Me now, here, where you don’t miss out on anything if I am present, with you?” I thank you for your great friendship.

Do you see? Nobody assures us that we can get up in the morning without being on the defensive, but we can still open ourselves up to another possibility and begin to look at the circumstances, allowing ourselves to be struck by what comes toward us, as Fr. Giussani teaches us. When we don’t allow ourselves to be distracted by other things that may seem to facilitate a solution, but rather accept reality as it is, we begin to realize that change is not so much in doing things, but in an openness, an openness to the You who comes to meet us in those circumstances: “Do you love me? Why are you afraid?” Allowing this You to enter, refusing to compromise our sincerity in looking at Him, makes “new knowledge” possible. I am introduced to this “new knowledge” by adhering with all my freedom to that You.

Here is the experience I have had of new knowledge as the “only way we can relate to reality without preconceptions, according to all its factors” (point 5 on p. 54), which is possible only by “being contemporary with the event that generates it” (ibid.). Recently, I had difficulties at work and I was unable to recover; I felt defined by them. I reread your Christmas letter in the Corriere della Sera because I remembered that I was struck by this phrase, “Why don’t you look at yourself as I look at you, as I look at your humanity? Don’t you realize that I became a child just to show you all the preference I have for you?” (December 24, 2019). This opened a crack. Gradually I began to breathe and it was a change in my way of looking that pulled me out of nothingness. But it didn’t end there because in the following days I read in the School of Community that “living in

the flesh, I am part of an Event that makes me capable of a new intelligence, a more profound and truer understanding of my circumstances” (p. 55). Facing circumstances with faith in the Son of God, in an adherence to Christ, “I am invited to adhere in the flesh to the being of things, to get down to the reality of things, right down to where they are made” (ibid.). This made me realize that I had stopped at my initial reaction and had not entered into the flesh of things. On the other hand, when I get down to “the reality of things, right down to where they are made,” then “the person before me, whoever he may be, is and marks out the road through which I reach Christ, the You of which all things are made, and so for that person I have esteem, respect, adoration, I can adore his face” (p. 56). This was a Copernican revolution for me, because suddenly it became clear to me that my relationship with people, even those with whom I had difficulty, could be an opportunity instead of an impediment, a desirable possibility for me and for them. Furthermore, I understood one thing about myself: only within the embrace of a You who loves me and wants me can I admit my limits easily, freely, not feeling defined by them; otherwise I defend myself. I conclude by saying that the fact that the School of Community, sometimes so difficult, spoke to me in the circumstances, was an event. The School of Community illuminated reality, which in turn illuminated the School of Community! I am very happy because sometimes I envied the people who attend this School of Community—what happened to them didn’t happen to me. Instead on this occasion it happened to me, too. Maybe one just needs to have the humility to stay and watch and have a way of looking with sincerity at the event.

That’s it. “This made me realize that I had stopped at my initial reaction”; that is, that you had remained only at the appearance without going into the depth of things. Fr. Giussani wants to educate us to this: not to look for an alternative, dualistic way with of living in reality, but instead to live intensely the real, to reach the depth of things with your gaze, and to recognize within that depth the You who makes you. ““Though living in the flesh, I live in faith in the Son of God””; that is, “I belong to an Event, to an origin that changes the way I look at things; the way I look at things becomes faith” (p. 55). Faith is this gaze into the depth of reality made possible by his Presence, otherwise dualism prevails. Instead, in this way any circumstance or “the person before me, whoever he may be, [...] marks out the road through which I reach Christ, the You of which all things are made, and so for that person I have esteem, respect, [...] I can adore his face” (p. 56). This is a “Copernican revolution,” as you said. This is what we have to decide, friends: whether to accept this Copernican revolution that Fr. Giussani introduces into our relationship with reality so as to overcome dualism, or to multiply initiatives that don’t make any difference. This is our contribution to the world, our yes to him.

After an evening spent in video connection with some friends, a question arose, “Can my way of looking that opens up and my adhesion, my yes, truly serve the world?” That evening we talked about this situation that we have been forced to live, offering all sort of analyses of this period, of the economy, information, communications, “phase one” and “phase two.” It seems impossible to me that my yes can contribute in any way to the world. How can my yes, as I am forced at home into doing the usual, simple, and banal daily things, be useful to the world? I said to myself, “It can help me, and it is already helping me a lot, but helping the world?” It just seemed impossible to me. As if what you wrote in the letter to the Fraternity—“At this time [...] our recognition of Christ and our yes to Him, including in the isolation each of us might be forced to maintain, is already our contribution to the salvation of every man and woman today” (Milan, March 12,

2020)—was really not possible. Then something happened to me that I wanted to understand to see whether I am on the right track. This morning I got up and found on my nightstand the breakfast that my daughter had prepared. Her gesture made it clear to me that I am the object of an infinite good, and in preparing lunch for my family today, I desired this good for all those who sat at the table. I said to myself, “If any of these seven people who have lunch at this table will see this good, they can take it wherever they are. And gradually, God willing, it will continue to spread.” Then, going over a passage of the *School of Community*, I read the point where Fr. Giussani says, “Because the good is not ‘the good,’ but attachment to Him, following that face, His Presence, carrying his Presence everywhere” (p. 66). In this way, I had a glimpse of how the diabolical doubt that had arisen that evening can be dispelled. I wanted to know what you thought of this. Thank you.

Perfect! Do you see? You already have the answer to the question you asked: the doubt was “dispelled.” Why is it dispelled? Because you recognize that the way you respond, your yes, becomes a good for everyone. We have seen this today in the many episodes people have recounted: in a mother who perceives what is good for her daughter and vice versa, when someone else goes into the hospital to give birth and the nurses tell her that entering her room is different than entering the rooms of others. Each of the things that the people who spoke this evening told us shows what our contribution to the world is. Why? Because we have received grace—we have seen this in the *School of Community*—for this very reason. This is our task: “The apostles and their successors enter with Christ into the flow of his Spirit and share in Jesus’s own mission. Their fundamental function, the task they are chosen for, is to introduce mankind into a definitive relationship with the Mystery of God. And along with the bishops and the priests, all Christians are called to be part of this choice and of the responsibility for this function” (p. 45). Introducing humanity into a definitive relationship with the Mystery because the good is adherence to Him is our fundamental function, we who have received the grace of being chosen by the Mystery to be witnesses of something that is for everyone.

To the extent that we live the unity of the “I” without dualisms, from the encounter up to the You, and we experience a totally unitary gaze, we become more aware that faith “flourishes on the extreme boundary of the rational dynamic as a flower of grace to which man adheres with his freedom” (p. 24). Faith, in fact, generates a totally united “I,” which in turn arouses unity among us, that is, community. Only to the extent that we follow the proposal that Fr. Giussani has made to us will we be able to see this happen in us and in others.

School of Community. In this period, I am preparing a text for continuing the work on the theme we chose for the Spiritual Exercises that we had to forgo this year: “What saves us from nothingness?”.

The Introduction is ready. It was written drawing upon your contributions about your experiences in facing the challenges posed by coronavirus pandemic.

Thus for the next *School of Community*, I propose that you begin working on the Introduction, which you will find on the CL site on Monday, May 11, keeping in mind the first two chapters of the *School of Community* that we have covered in these month, and that we continue to work on. As we have also seen this evening, they are crucial because they are at the origin of the “Copernican revolution” of which our friend spoke, touching our way of knowing and being in reality, and are a help for understanding the relationship between circumstances and the “new knowledge” that the

Christian event introduces into our life. The new capacity of gaze and affection described in these two chapters is the one true modality for living the present and should be the awareness with which we live all the circumstances of reality.

“For the mentality to be truly new, its awareness of ‘belonging’ needs to be continually engaged in a comparison with present events. Since it is born of a place in the present, it judges the present, otherwise it is non-existent. If it does not enter into present experience, the new knowledge doesn’t exist – it is an abstraction. In this sense, not to judge events is to mortify the faith” (p. 54). If this new awareness is not continually engaged with present events, it does not penetrate life, nor can it be understood or be taken on, and above all, as the chapter says, faith is mortified because it does not open reason.

Therefore, from the point of view of both method and content, let’s keep in mind this month the Introduction to the new text and the work done so far on *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, so that our verification will not be an abstract reflection, but will consist of identifying in ourselves that new knowledge and affection, as we did today, that will enable us to live the circumstances of reality in a new way, as a true “new creature.” For that matter, the challenges we are living leave us no space for detaching ourselves from this urgent need, as we will also see in the Introduction I have just indicated.

The next School of Community will be held on Wednesday, June 17, at 9:00 p.m.: we will inform you about the format, which will be decided according to the evolution of the indications of the healthcare authorities for next month.

The book for the month of May is *Il risveglio dell’umano. Riflessioni da un tempo vertiginoso [Reawakening our Humanity. Reflections in a Dizzying Time]*.

This book is the product of a particular circumstance: the editorial managers for BUR and Rizzoli were sent my letter to the Fraternity and the article published in *Corriere della Sera*, and thinking that the content would be useful for everyone, they proposed that I develop it further. The result is this e-book. It was an opportunity for me to reflect on what we all have been living, sharing with everyone the richness that we live. It is currently available in e-book format for € 2.49 euros for the month of May and for € 3.99 from June onwards. The publisher has indicated that the paper version will be ready June 12 at the cost of € 8.00.

Common Fund. At the School of Community in April we pointed out the need for great seriousness in the commitment to the Common Fund, as this situation is very difficult from economic point of view and your contributions are important for helping with the needs that are emerging among us. I was very moved by the way many of you have embraced this reminder, keeping to the criterion of judgement expressed by the Movement, according to the original educative position that Fr. Giussani taught us.

The May issue of *Tracce* is available online, and is free for everyone. In these two months it has been the only possibility, other than the subscription, for receiving and using it with friends and colleagues. In this regard, let me mention the problem of subscriptions: normally at the Spiritual Exercises several thousand people subscribe, but this year we did not have this possibility. So I

hope that you take seriously the invitation to subscribe, because, as you know, a subscription to *Tracce* is a way to support the activity of communication, also through the web page.

Sharing of documentation of the Movement and of Fr. Giussani. I would like to remind you that the Movement normally posts on its website or through its official instruments all the documentation useful for our journey. Please do not promote the sharing of other documents and material that might be altered or its sources not verified, because it creates considerable confusion in a time when through the internet and social networks everything can be passed off as the truth.

Summer vacations. Many people are asking us for indications about the summer vacations of the communities, a gesture that our educative journey has always proposed every year and of which we are all very fond. I think that in order to judge how to deal with this aspect of our proposal in these extraordinary times, each of us should look at the experience lived in these months. As I said at the beginning, some have called it “suspended time,” but the experience that I have seen in many of us has been anything but this! It has been a full time, dense with meaning and discoveries, albeit in a context of life completely different from before, deprived of many things, one we did not decide for ourselves. So then, if we look at the experience we have had, perhaps it is the source of the best suggestion also for looking at the summer vacations: we are not called to live “suspended” nor to invent something to fill the emptiness, but to live this circumstance too in an unforeseeably different way, as we have heard this evening. What a gain there is in obeying the inevitable circumstances, like these, that we have not decided for ourselves, allowing ourselves to change. Keeping in mind the healthcare situation still underway, the Government’s regulations up to now and also the delicate legal implications, the current situation is telling us that it is not possible to propose the gesture of the community vacations. Naturally, nothing prohibits limited groups of people and families, under their own exclusive responsibility, from deciding to organize periods of vacation and shared living, in full respect of the current regulations. However, with the Center of the Movement, we have evaluated that Communion and Liberation as such, on both the central and the local levels, will not promote any community vacations.

I am certain that we will be able to recount to each other the human gain that we will have from obeying the circumstances and from the attentive creativity that will be unleashed by doing so.

“Special Edition” of the Meeting of Rimini. The 2020 Meeting, entitled, “Devoid of wonder, we remain deaf to the sublime,” will be held August 18-23 in Rimini. Encounters, exhibits, and performances will take place primarily in the Rimini Palacongressi in digital mode. If the regulations allow it in August, a limited number of people will be able to participate in person. Given the particular situation, the participation of volunteers is reserved mostly for adults with specific skills, who will be contacted directly by the Meeting organizers. Other volunteers who have collaborated with past Meetings will be contacted for their help in promoting the Meeting.

Communication of announcements of the Movement. As already mentioned last time, a new web platform “Avvisi CL” [*CL announcements*] has been set up to post the central announcements of the Movement. Therefore, I strongly encourage you to download this App, as it is the one avenue for communicating national announcements.

Veni Sancte Spiritus.
Good evening to everyone!