

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
via video connection from Milan, December 16, 2020**

Reference text: L. Giussani, S. Alberto, and J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010, chapter 2, point 7, "Responsibility and Decision," pp. 68-70.

- *Sou feliz Senhor*
- *Nostalgija*

Glory Be

Good evening everyone! Let's start our work on the text of School Community that tonight, despite being only a few pages long, is packed with substantive content, as shown by the contributions that have been received.

I have a question—actually, I have a series of questions—to which I really don't know the answers and to which it seems to me that no one knows the answers. I read and reread point 7 and also asked my School of Community group to work on it twice, but I can't get past the first line. Fr. Giussani states that God loves us, and he says this as a clear fact. He adds that I "am," that is, that I have substance, only because God loves me. He emphasizes that what I have been asked to do, what is important for me to do, is to "acknowledge and accept" that He loves me. Fr. Giussani then says that to acknowledge this,—to really acknowledge it, in action, not in words!—is what makes me the protagonist of my own life and gives me pleasure. Well, if I think about my life, how I live, what I feel, what I want, what it means to feel loved, I can't really grasp this: How can I say that God loves me? How can I be sure that He loves me? What must I "acknowledge and accept"? I tried to follow a process of elimination. It certainly cannot be a syllogism, the result of reasoning like "God created me, He still creates me (so much so that I continue to live), therefore He loves me." It can't be that because reasoning doesn't make me feel loved at all. Not at all. This is just some reasoning that doesn't move anything in my life. It can't be an emotion I feel because and when things are going well for me. It can't be like saying, "God loves me because he gives me what I ask of Him," because many times this doesn't happen—things go wrong or go differently from what I want. It can't even be like saying, "I have friends who make me feel loved by God," because many times I feel alone, even though I am surrounded by friends, maybe even good friends. Fr. Giussani gives the example of the twelve apostles, of Peter and their relationship of friendship with Jesus. But I don't have Jesus as a friend and no one, really none of my friends, can be Jesus-like for me. So, I don't know how to answer the questions I asked you.

Does your mother love you? Can you answer yes to this question?

Yes.

Despite the limitations she may have?

Yes.

How do you recognize that? Because you are in front of a presence that loves you. Then it becomes easy to understand everything that Fr. Giussani says about the love of God. The only thing that matters to you, as it does me, is recognizing and accepting it. That your mother loves you is not

the result of reasoning and is not even a feeling, and the fact that she may have limitations doesn't make you less certain of her love. The difficulty you speak of exists in every relationship, my friend. The key question, before we talk about other things, is whether, when you go to bed tonight, you can say that your mother loves you. How can you say that for sure? What do you do to be able to say with certainty that your mother loves you? What would you do to verify it?

I would hug her.

Why would you hug her when you don't know yet whether she loves you? How do you know she loves you?

I know it based on the fact that she takes care of me and how she looks at me, based on what she does and...

You look at the signs your mom gives you, don't you?

Yes.

You do not do this through reasoning or by having a feeling, and it is not something that you question when you see her limitations. In fact, despite all her limitations, in certain gestures you perceive all of your mother's passionate dedication to you, until you reach the certainty that she loves you. This is the same journey that the disciples made with Jesus. So, the question is whether we can make the same journey in the present and come to recognize Jesus's love, God's love for us. If this isn't possible, then you would be right. Christianity is just like the event of your mother's love: it manifests itself through certain signs. You can't photograph your mom's love, but you can see signs through which she shows it to you, through which she shows you how much you are a good for her, how much you are truly loved. This makes it easier for you to recognize that "I am loved." I insist—it is the same path that the disciples followed. At one point, they had to answer the question about His love for them when Jesus provoked them: "Do you want to leave too? Aren't you sure I love you?" "Where can we go? Only you have words that fill life" (cf. Jn 6:67–68). Have you ever experienced such a jolt in your life, in front of some sign through which you perceived this love for yourself? Why are you a Christian? Why are you here tonight? I understand your difficulty. Think of someone like Azurmendi—whom we saw at Beginning Day—who had heard about Christianity all his life. It wasn't reasoning that moved him, but rather, running into something he couldn't avoid, something irreducible to his own thoughts: a presence that met him through some faces. So you have to follow the same path to see if you find signs that God loves you. If you don't find them, you can't produce them by yourself. If your mom doesn't give you signs of her love, I cannot be the one to convince you that she loves you by giving you a lesson on love, or on the feelings experienced by someone who is loved. If someone doesn't fall in love, I can't make them fall in love by reasoning—if that were enough, I would open an agency for those who are looking for someone to love them, and it would be a big business! Christianity cannot be created by us, we cannot produce it ourselves. That's why during this year, in our study of *Generating Traces*, we have seen that it all starts with an event. In point 7, Fr. Giussani takes this for granted, because it is exactly by virtue of an event that we can recognize that "we are loved"—as we saw—because we have been chosen, preferred, made capable of a new knowledge of reality, embraced, and forgiven. Everything we have seen is a sign of this event. If one has not recognized it, if you don't recognize it as you live your life, no one can generate it. The only thing to do, then, is to look. Keep looking! To be sure of your mother's love, you need to look at the signs. In the same way, you can see whether you have ever felt loved by God in your life. If you have not

perceived this but are struck when you see someone who has, begin to ask; pray for it and pay attention to those who have perceived the signs of His love. I am not saying you have to believe because of something other people see, but that if you pay attention, maybe you will start to see signs too. Maybe even tonight, if you look closely. Best wishes in this work, dearest.

Point 7, “Responsibility and decision,” strikes me when it says, “We have been loved and we are loved: this is why we ‘are,’” because it doesn’t say that we “feel” loved, nor does it say that we are loved and for this reason “we are well,” but suggests that being loved is a real condition of our being. The text says that the moral law and morality, our being commensurate concretely to the mystery of Being “expressed in action, [...], are judged by this first and fundamental ‘law’: acknowledging and accepting to be loved” (p. 68). In working on this point with our School of Community group, everyone recounted episodes in which they felt loved, and I realized that I want to better understand what this means to me, because I sense that everything in my life is played out in light of this recognition. The risk I see is that of reducing (even unknowingly) my being loved to my perception. This is terrible because then everything, even the way I look at myself, is reduced to my measure, and so first of all cannot hold because at a certain point this measure is confronted with dark moments in circumstances and relationships that aren’t like I imagined them. Then the horizon of life narrows to what I perceive, and in the end I verify only my attempts; I become like a child who is having a tantrum. Instead, I want to be a grown-up, in the sense of living more and more up to the stature of the desire I have within me; I want to live fully and I don’t want to dismiss anything, not even a moment of difficulty like the one I am experiencing now. That’s why I wanted to ask you for some help to better understand what it means to recognize that you are loved.

Do you see the shift you made? You began with Fr. Giussani’s “we are loved: this is why we ‘are’” (p. 68). At some point, however, you reduced everything to your own measure, verifying only your attempts. Yet, your attempts aren’t what can introduce you to a discovery of being loved. The point is to find a person next to you who, despite your attempts and your own measure, continues to love you. Has this ever happened to you? This is what constantly challenges you: even if you fail, there is someone who loves you. If you don’t acknowledge and follow this, you will continue to use your measure to verify your attempts that aren’t adequate for your life. It is the demonstration that you have moved away from what the School of Community proposes. Don’t be frightened, though, because this risk is part of the road to certainty, as you can see. You say that there is a risk of reducing being loved to the way you look at yourself, to your measure. Many times, instead of being continuously open to the love that another has for us, the temptation in an affective relationship is to judge the love that another has for us by measuring what we are able to do. Yet you can’t succeed by following your measure. Realizing this is precisely the work to which the School of Community invites us.

Faced with increasingly complicated and problematic situations in significant relationships, there are only two possibilities: to continue to analyze the problem from all points of view, trying to see who is “to blame” for what is happening, without finding a way out (like the cat, more and more tangled in the ball of wool), or to look at the School of Community, the only place where I can find respite, a liberation in the exaltation of my person: “We have been loved and we are loved: this is why we ‘are.’” This statement is really “original,” in the sense that it refers to the origin, but how

many times do I not realize this! If I am already loved, why don't I see it? Why am I so distracted? Why do I try to live off of what doesn't satisfy me and leaves my heart empty? Or, even worse, gives me a restlessness that tells me I'm alive only because, like Martha in the Gospel, I deal with many things without enjoying any of them? Only when I become aware of the fact that my heart breathes when it recognizes You, Lord, do I, in the fiber of my body, of my being, tend toward You, and not have the need to get lost in other things. Your promise is close to me during this Advent season, like the star of the Magi. The School of Community says, "[He] decided to come amongst us, to live with me and to speak to me in a familiar way with His words [...] drawn from the eternal, from the depths of Being in whom he has made me share" (p. 68). What can I do besides letting myself be provoked and persuaded by such a beautiful Christmas wish? Can I not beg the Lord for these words (His words) to become flesh in me? Do I have something more important to wait for, to live, to communicate than "the word becomes flesh again," to prevent me from getting lost, from losing my way? He becomes present again so that I may recognize Him. He is given to me again in my story, reaching me in a concrete way here and now. I thank the Lord for His patience and for the movement that never tires of repeating this in this text, so that at a certain point I can come to contemplate this unique gift. About the rest, we will see.

This is an example of how to do the work of School of Community. As we saw earlier, we can shift from reading one thing to verifying another, and what we verify is not faith, is not Christianity, is not Christ, but our attempts, which are meant to fail and can't hold in the face of circumstances and significant relationships with husbands, children, friends, and so on. Yet, we always have another chance, rather than continuing to beat ourselves up because we fail in our attempts and try to find out who is to blame. This is the promise of the School of Community: instead of contemplating our navel and what we can do according to our measure, we are given the opportunity to look at something else. This is crucial because if there is no presence, if there is no place that constantly redirects us, we are finished. If our friend who spoke earlier hadn't had the opportunity to be here in a place that redirects us away from our usual way of acting, she would have continued to think that she was doing the work of School of Community, while she was really pursuing her own attempts and not following the School of Community. As soon as one begins to grasp this, the test offered by the School of Community—everyone can take it at home or at work, with their children or with their spouse, with anyone—allows us to begin breathing freely in the circumstances we are living and to experience a liberation, an exaltation, of our humanity. This means that we have two possible ways of doing the work of the School of Community. Your presence here this evening means that you have all done the work of School of Community seriously at least once; otherwise, you wouldn't have been able to formulate your contributions or say the things you have said. The problem is that one can read the text and not allow one's position to be shifted. Yet, as soon as one allows oneself to be shifted, he can begin to see the fulfillment of the promise. That is why it is helpful to do School of Community together—we can consistently help each other move beyond our measure. We can do what we want with the text, but we need an irreducible presence in the present that prevents us from gobbling up the text and losing what's best. It is as if you had your mother by your side who, in the face of your nonsense and measures, continued to love you and challenge you with her presence, just as Jesus challenged the disciples. Christianity is this presence in history, it is a place like this where we are constantly faced with something irreducible that prevents us from allowing the common mentality to prevail (according

to which everyone measures himself based on what he can do). If we could succeed in life based on what we do, we would not need Christ! Christ has promised us that if we follow Him, we will begin to see again what happens in life. What is the sign that we are on the path He indicates? A correspondence with our structural expectation. Why are you doing this work of School of Community? To be able to breathe, to feel truly loved. So, only if we walk this path—Fr. Giussani has always helped us on this journey like no one else—can we experience in the present what the disciples were able to experience in their relationship with Jesus. It isn't that they didn't make the same mistakes we make, it isn't that they didn't shift their attention to what they did, like we do—for example, they wanted fire from heaven to descend on the Samaritans who didn't convert and they wanted to determine who was the greatest among them, they discussed everything—but there was always a Presence that introduced a different way of looking at everything. We see that this corresponds to what we want: to be loved. And so we begin to “be” in a different way.

In the School of Community I read that “if I ‘am’ because I am loved, then the great problem [...] is my answer—my answer to the You who loves me” (p. 68), my experience of correspondence, the enhancement of what He created in me at my origin, so that I can become aware of Him. I don't want to dismiss this step with an intuition that is not completely clear to me. If I don't understand this step well, the risk is substituting an exaltation of my humanity with an effort of my willpower. Can you help me understand more deeply this “enhancement”? Thank you very much.

Do you see? What the first contribution said is true—we start from a fact that if I “am,” it is because I am loved. I am loved, therefore I am. That's it, whether you realize it or not. My mother loves me even if I don't realize it, and many children sometimes need time to realize it. We are loved. The Mystery didn't ask us for our permission to love us, He sent His Son and continues to take initiative. As you can see, He reaches out to us through many signs—every time we get together, a deluge of signs arise that show the initiative that the Mystery continues to take toward us. This is a fact, as the first contribution said. It is a fact, so this is not the problem. The issue, “the great problem,” is my answer, that is, that I become aware of it and respond. Christianity enhances everything I need in order to become aware of Him: all the potential of my “I,” all the gifts I have inside me are exalted. But if I don't get involved with all of my humanity, I don't recognize it, even if God's love for me is continuous. That is why the point you highlighted is fundamental: it is “the” great problem. God's love is a fact, and “the” great problem is my response, which is that I become aware of this love and acknowledge it. How do I recognize it? With what can I verify whether it corresponds to me? When I experience being liberated and breathing freely, what is exalted, enhanced in me? My heart. My heart is exalted when I breathe freely. What is enhanced when I recognize this? My reason, which allows me to recognize it. When I join the event, because I don't want to miss it, what is the Christian fact enhancing? My freedom. And when Christ “glues” me to Himself, what is He enhancing? My affection. My whole “I” is enhanced, exalted in the Christian fact! For this reason, it is not enough that there is the fact. The fact must really move my whole “I” in its depths, it must put to work and awaken every aspect of the being that I am because only in this way can I truly understand what it means to be loved. Otherwise, friends, the words of the School of Community don't affect us and as a result we continue to live according to other parameters without even realizing it. For this reason, let's now see the rest of the chapter in action: the enhancement of every aspect of our “I.”

As I worked on point 7, I realized that I couldn't follow in Fr. Giussani's footsteps. During School of Community, I realized I had fallen behind. I can't understand why Fr. Giussani links responsibility to being loved. For me, responsibility is a matter of willpower. For example: I get married and start a family and this means taking responsibility. I do something at work and I am responsible for it. Being loved is very beautiful, but not so decisive for my life. I mean, I feel loved, but that doesn't change my life. I can't see the magnitude of it. But now I can't look the other way. I would like to have a deep awareness of this love of which I am the object, and I will explain why. Recently, we had the grace to be part of a great event—a forty-year-old woman was baptized thanks to a meeting with a priest friend of ours (who died just over a month ago). We are in front of Christ, who has taken hold of this person and has become so close to us and so evident. Yet, even in the face of this fact, I am always the one who decides, and I take responsibility for following Him. I thank the Lord for this gift, really, but it doesn't make me think that it is a gesture of love for me. My problem is that being loved and knowing that I am loved doesn't change my life. What wonder must one experience because he feels loved!

That's exactly right, so let's see! But first there are others who have the same issue—that life does not change.

“The nature of the decision is not a strong act of will” (p. 70). “The decision cannot be taken in the voluntary sense (as being synonymous with willpower)” (p. 69). Faced with these words, I can say that I agree, I can say that I find them liberating because they ease the burden of my effort, I can say that it is better to give in to an attraction, a sympathy, than to pursue personal success. In short, I am led to confirm what I read, which seems all right and good. Yet, some symptoms of a problem show up stubbornly that create a perpetual state of dissatisfaction: I never change, I always make the same mistakes, I am still like this at my age. My will is the focus of my attention, even though I think I know that the necessary decision is not an act of will. Confirming what I read blocks me, ties me to the “already known”; I realize that there is a step to be taken, otherwise only the measure of my limitations remains. What is this step and how do we take it? Thank you.

Has anyone discovered the connection between being loved and changing and been amazed by it?

I have, in the context of a simple fact. I, too, in working on this point, got a little stuck on the decision for freedom. Fr. Giussani says that “responsibility is expressed as freedom's decision in front of the Presence that is acknowledged as corresponding totally to one's destiny. But all too often our way of thinking of freedom's decision is mistaken as if it were an act I ultimately determine, as if I were the one to decide”(pp. 68–69), and therefore, as the last contribution also said, an act of will. It seems to me that there is a subtle misconception about the fact that I am the one who decides. I think that what he wants to highlight here is where the decision comes from: it comes from a tenderness, that tenderness and human sympathy that Peter felt for Christ; it is my decision (I can always say no), but the origin is an affection. It isn't that every morning my decision has to come from nothing because it is born from a story. I understood this from something that happened to me. A few days ago I had an meeting with the teacher of one of my daughters, during which his care for his students, his concern that they feel “that someone is waiting for them” emerged. In fact, my daughter describes him as a teacher who really cares about them. He studies

his subjects with passion and any student who doesn't do the homework, his homework, is in trouble! My daughter has the perception that he is someone who is waiting for her, and if someone is waiting for you, you get up in the morning and you are on time for class—and if in the grayness of your school hours there is something unexpected like that, you move. Therefore, our openness is not an effort, but is generated by an attraction, by an affectus, like that of Peter. I would like you to go deeper into this point.

No, no, there is no need to go deeper, because things are so simple! The point is that we get stuck because we think that we are the ones making the change. Instead, change is the surprise at something that happens following an attraction. If you wanted to force your daughter with your will because that attraction seems too weak to move her, you would find yourself in front of a wall. Instead, she, standing in front of an attraction, never misses an opportunity to get moving: “I am in big trouble if I don't do my homework!” Where does this change come from? From being loved, from the judgment of esteem that she feels toward herself. And this doesn't make the answer mechanical, but exalts and enhances all her freedom, all her affection, and draws her to study and do her homework. This is what changes our lives. Fr. Giussani gives the example of the kid with many shortcomings who falls in love. Even if the girl will say no to him, his mother, who knows him very well, notices that he has changed. In time she can't help but recognize that her son has changed because of the love he feels for the girl, the only thing that can move the center of his “I.” That is why what Fr. Giussani states is crucial: “Responsibility [...] assures the outcome [the person must be involved because it cannot be mechanical] of an experience of correspondence” (p. 68) that one has in front of an attraction. If you just watch from the sidelines, you will not be able to taste life. In fact, it is in this response—like that of your daughter, drawn by the attraction she follows at school—that “the main [pay attention!] source of zest for life” [we don't realize what we are missing!] is present. “If you are not responsible [if she doesn't follow, if she doesn't engage with that attraction] within what gives you pleasure [not what doesn't give you pleasure], or what attracts you [not what is harder for you], if you do not participate in it with some responsibility, then it is not yours [she will not enjoy doing her homework]. So, heaven [heaven which begins here] implies a decision of yours, it implies [your] responsibility, because heaven is for man and man is free ” (ibid.). Here is, again, the exaltation, the enhancement of man. If every aspect of the “I” is not enhanced, nothing can become ours.

I also want to say something about freedom and decision. I was struck by some passages in the point we are reflecting on, including “all too often our way of thinking of freedom's decision is mistaken [...] [and that] I [...] decide to say, ‘your will be done.’ No, it is something else. The decision cannot be [...] synonymous with willpower” (p. 69), and “For Peter it was a friendship that did not depend on him, but had been brought to birth in him” (p. 70), and “The decision springs forth as the establishment of a sympathy” (ibid). Reviewing these passages threw me off a bit in the sense that just as I thought I had understood how the relationship between my “I”—with its insuppressible need to be happy—and the Mystery who alone can fulfill it “works,” here comes this definition of freedom that, contrary to what is always proposed to us to believe, and which has therefore seeped into me imperceptibly, has nothing to do with expressions like “I choose,” “I commit myself,” and so on. This confuses me a bit, because it seems that the freedom thus described is above all the fruit of grace and therefore also a free gift, so you could say that it has

little to do with my decision to adhere to the Mystery present in reality. The problem is not that the signs that He is present are lacking: in my daily experience and in the testimonies offered to us by our companionship—if I stop to look at them—it is true that it is easy to recognize Him. But adherence and following are still dependent on my yes, which I still understand to mean that “I have to work harder,” “I still betray too many times,” “I am weak,” and so on, making me question what I can do to improve my adherence to Him. Yet, if I look at my story in some crucial moments of my life—when it was more obvious that what was happening to me was for me, so that I could be happier, so that I could adhere more closely to Him—when I was asked to follow in those moments, I—and my friends know this—instead of saying yes, asked, “How can I not say yes?” meaning that if I said no it would be something less for my humanity, that I would give up an opportunity to become more myself, and therefore happy. I must say that this position has overcome the thousand objections and fears that inevitably accompanied these moments. It didn’t take away the difficulty of those circumstances, but I never had to regret my answer. I am asking you for help with this with the following two questions (which have already been addressed a bit): In what sense is the grace of a sympathy not an alternative to freedom, but rather its fullest expression? How can I not make the mistake of entrusting my answer to the You who loves me to my willpower, which in any case is never enough, and—as we can see—is weak?

Have you received the grace of being loved?

Oh, very much!

Oh! Was this an alternative to your freedom, or was it what sparked your freedom? We think that either it is grace or it is freedom. Instead the point is that when you met the woman who would become your wife, nothing else provoked your freedom like her presence, her beauty, her attractiveness. Is this clear? The presence of this gift, of this overwhelming grace, is what moved your freedom the most. This is just a pale reflection of what happened when the Christian event burst into history. When the disciples met Christ, when we met the Christian event, it was grace made flesh that aroused all of their freedom and ours. If we are all here this evening, it is only because this grace that has taken on a face, a name, that has become flesh and continues to dwell among us, eliciting our adherence. Through this dynamic, the Mystery collaborates in our salvation—without the establishment of this attraction, of this sympathy, freedom does not move and therefore no decision is made.

On Friday at the Radius meeting of GS (the group of CL high school students) there were witnesses by Giorgio Vittadini and Mireille from Cameroon concerning the AVSI Christmas Tents initiative. While one of them was speaking, the mother of one of my students wrote me a message asking, “Who is the gentleman who is speaking?” I was a little confused, because this lady is not in the movement, her son doesn’t go to GS, and I only know her because her youngest daughter is in class with one of mine. I checked the list of participants in the meeting and saw that my student was actually connected, but I didn’t know who had invited the woman’s son. I answered her, “Giorgio Vittadini.” She replied, “What he is saying is interesting.” Then Mireille started to speak, and at one point the lady wrote to me again, saying, “This woman is beautiful, and it is amazing how she can express so well what she has to say even though she is not Italian. You can see that what she says is true!” Then I had a problem at home, so I had to disconnect and stop following the meeting. In the evening I wrote to her asking if she stayed connected until the end.

She answered me, “It was an intense and moving testimony. I stayed and listened until the end. Thank you.” I was very surprised, because it seemed to me the same dynamic of the beginning that happened with Azurmendi, Peter, and even me.

Do you see? What glued that lady to these two people totally unknown to her? She didn't take a class to get to know people; she simply found herself in front of two strangers and couldn't avoid being drawn by them, remaining glued to the video until the end. The last ones to arrive document the simplicity of the Christian event, which happens in the way it has been described. The grace of this sympathy that arises for a person then leads one to adhere, to not turn off the video connection until the end. For that mother, it wasn't because of a sentimental attachment or an emotional phenomenon. It was a phenomenon of reason, a manifestation of reason that attaches you to the person in front of you. Yet, sometimes we find this hard to understand, don't we?

What does it mean that “where a relationship is generated that turns into a deep sympathy, [...] rationality is an event” (p. 70)? I ask you because lately I often find my small town, my work in my small school, and my small companionship of friends, a bit suffocating for me. If I look at my actions, I can't deny that there is a point of affection that starts from an encounter I had. The truth I look for in dialogue with my coworkers, the time I spend preparing for Christmas Eve with my School of Community, my desire to follow the questions that arise in my students and in the GS kids—all of this speaks to me of a sympathy for something that ultimately determines me. Yet, reason then takes over, which gives way to an objection: “This cannot be everything; you have always wanted to live in a big city with a large companionship, and instead look at how many flaws these people have. You are 26 years old and you still don't have a stable job and a family, as you have always wanted.” Then I ask myself about the future: “What should I do to ensure that my life finds stability next year?” My reason seems to block my ability to fully experience an affection for Christ. Reading Azurmendi's book, I understand that this was not the case for him. The more he applied reason to describe, explain, and understand what he saw in the people and places he met, the more his affection seemed to grow. In him reason and affection go hand in hand. I am so jealous! I understand that rationality cannot correspond to my thoughts, but how can I make affection and sympathy, which I also see in me, become one with my reason? What does it mean that “rationality is an event”? It seems to me that rationality is something that comes from my mind. Thank you for helping me not censor anything of myself and for the fact that in this place everything can become an entreaty.

You identified a crucial question, dearest friend, and you expressed it with the words, “My reason seems to block my ability to fully experience an affection for Christ,” but then you added, “Reading Azurmendi's book, I understand this was not the case for him.” In fact, for Azurmendi, using reason in a certain way not only did not block this ability, but he was able to stick more and more to what he saw. What is the relationship between affection and reason? To prevent reason from becoming a measure, he had to follow the affection he felt, instead of detaching himself from it, as happens to you. If the daughter of our friend who spoke earlier broke away from her affection for her teacher, she wouldn't be using reason well. It is affection that prevents you from reducing reason to measure. That is why it is friendship and sympathy that makes us use reason well, according to its nature as a total openness to reality. Do you know where you reach the apex of rationality, according to Fr. Giussani? In John and Andrew. John and Andrew were glued to Jesus

all afternoon, and this allowed them to leave his home saying, “We have found the Messiah.” Seeing Him speak, their affection for Him, their being glued to Him, allowed their reason to expand—according to its true nature as openness—to include the totality of the reality of that person, whom they did not leave again. That is why reason doesn’t exist apart from affection. We are, after all, rationalists, and we always overlook the element of affection, which is an obstacle to the rationalist mentality. Instead, when we see that an intelligent person like Azurmendi, who has all the characteristics of an absolutely rational man, allows all of his reason to be dilated, widened by admiration of a fact to the point of following it, that is rationality. We must realize that this is the great rule, the great suggested method that the charism offers us for our journey. One can, a second after finishing Azurmendi’s book, turn away and continue to verify only one’s attempts using one’s own measure. One cannot attach himself affectively to something and then reason about it by detaching himself from the results of that affection. Do you see? We are divided. Therefore, if there is nothing that facilitates the unity of our “I” (which is the only way to properly know something), if there is no present event (as we studied in the School of Community) that continuously promotes a new kind of knowledge, we ultimately reduce Christianity to sentimentality and reason to rationalism. Instead, Fr. Giussani’s genius is to follow experience. In fact, as you all witnessed, if one simply follows the charism, then everything happens, even in a situation in which it would seem impossible.

I wanted to tell you about two episodes involving my mom that I connected to the point we are now working on in the School of Community. My mother belongs to the Fraternity, but she hasn’t been able to participate in the exercises or retreats for twenty years due to a health condition. A few weeks ago, our friends from Spain organized an evening of singing during the EncuentroMadrid. The event was presented online because of the health emergency, and I watched it with my mom. It struck me that she liked our Fado, but what really moved her was the last song of the evening, La Strada, which our friends made us all sing together with Benedetto Chieffo. My mom also tried to sing (!), even as she was moved to tears. I thought, “This is a judgment.” At that moment, it became clear that a judgment is not an intellectual formulation of an opinion about reality, but a gesture of the heart that experiences a correspondence in the path of grace, as my mom witnessed to me! There are no excuses! Although she has been bedridden for twenty years, her heart does not grow tired, does not fail! This echoes your insistence on watching at the Beginning Day, because letting yourself be generated passes through this step, and becomes affection. A few days ago, we had the Fraternity Advent retreat (also via video connection), which I participated in with my mother. She followed everything—lesson and assembly! I am struck by what the School of Community says about Peter: “It was not a sentimental attachment, an emotional phenomenon, but a phenomenon of reason, a manifestation of that reason that ‘attaches’ you to the person before you, since it is a judgment of value” (p. 69), and then: “Peter’s yes was neither the result of willpower nor the result of a ‘decision’ of Simon, the man. It was the emergence, the surfacing of a whole chain of tenderness and of adherence that was explained by the esteem he had for Him (therefore it was an act of reason), which meant his only answer could be yes.” (p. 70). This is exactly what happened to my mother in her bed and without saying a word! Then I thought about how many coats of glue must have been added and continue to be added to my mother’s experience (even after twenty years during which she hasn’t gone to the gatherings of the community) through

her many friendships and her family, in her personal relationship with Jesus, so that at this unexpected moment this profound sympathy may come out, an affective judgment that judges me as well! How can you object? What can you think is still lacking? What can hold us back? I am not saying this because I am scandalized, but because I am provoked by these things, which I feel are being addressed to me, as your company provokes me, Julián, to look at everything that happens to us—even this mysterious and painful period of the pandemic—as an opportunity for good that continues to be offered to my freedom. It involves a new possibility to take a risk once again, to challenge the nothingness of all my ideas, projects, and opinions, and even the weight of circumstances, to say, “I” in front of a You that is becoming an increasingly familiar, concrete, and real father. Thank you.

Thank you, dearest friend. No condition, not even being bedridden for twenty years, can prevent your mother from experiencing that jolt that gives rise to her yes; it does not involve a superhuman effort, but, as for Peter, it is the “surfacing of a whole chain of tenderness and of adherence that was explained by the esteem he had for Him ” (p. 70). As you said, Peter’s initial astonishment was not something sentimental, but a judgment that became an attachment, a judgment that was like glue, a judgment that glued Peter and the disciples to Jesus—every day coats of glue were added, making it impossible for them to free themselves from that bond. This is what makes it possible to follow the event even after twenty years spent in bed, still able to see life change in you to the point of being moved to tears. This is the promise Christ makes to us, no matter our situation.

School of Community. The next School of Community will be held on Wednesday, January 20th, 2021, at 9:00 p.m.

This month we will work on point 8 of the second chapter of *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, entitled “The Concrete Form of the Election Is the Temple in Time.”

Book of the month. The book of the month for January will be my text on education, published by Edizioni San Paolo, entitled *Educazione: Comunicazione di Se` (Education: Communication of One’s Self)*, available also as an e-book.

We propose this book to everyone because we know well, as we have already perceived even this evening from a number contributions, that education is not a topic for just professionals. All of us, in fact, are in some way educators because in every move we make we express who we are, what it is that we rest on. As Fr. Giussani said, “Education is a communication of one’s self”; this is ultimately the way we affect the world in which we live and how we contribute to the “educational pact” desired by Pope Francis in order to “form mature individuals” able to “restore the fabric of relationships for the sake of a more fraternal humanity” (*Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Launch of the Global Compact on Education*, September 12, 2019).

This easily readable text can help show us that education is a permanent dimension of the person.

Traces subscription drive: “Chi ha un Amico Regala un Tesoro” (He who has a friend gifts him a treasure). Many people have joined the *Traces* subscription drive in recent weeks, which offered the opportunity to give a subscription to a friend at a very good price. The promotion ended yesterday but has been kept open until Saturday, December 19. Those who haven’t yet done so can take advantage of this opportunity for a few more days.

We are now close to Christmas, so we ask Our Lady that these days find us ready and attentive, with the simplicity of mind full of desire that flows from the certainty of having been chosen. As we have seen this evening, it is when we are in front of a real presence that we can be drawn in. Therefore, we live this time as an opportunity the Mystery offers to us to become aware of His presence among us because if there were no concrete human reality we would live in the most absolute oblivion. We ask that we not choose to rely on the efforts of our willpower, and that we be supported in the affection that drives everything. A fact as small as a child—a “breath,” Fr. Giussani said—amazes and captivates us because it is able to intercept and correspond to our whole humanity, because Christmas, after all, simplifies everything—an event simplifies everything—as we have heard in some of today’s witnesses. This involves a reversal of method: our lives no longer revolve around our effort to achieve something, but instead draw on the simplicity of an encounter that attracts us, to which we adhere so that we don’t lose it.

Merry Christmas to everyone!

Veni Sancte Spiritus