

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
via video connection from Milan, January 20, 2021**

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 8, "The Concrete Form of the Election is the Temple in Time," pp. 70–78.

- *Leaning on the Everlasting Arms*
- *Canzone del melograno* [song of the pomegranate]

Glory Be

Good evening everyone! Let's continue our journey. I want to begin with one of the many reactions that our recent Schools of Community, especially the last one, provoked.

These are difficult days in the different areas of my life, including work, home, and friendships. It seems that nothing is speaking to me and everything in front of me feels like an insurmountable mountain, impossible to climb. I read the School of Community and was provoked by those around me who kept telling me that it was beautiful. However, I read and re-read it and didn't understand anything; or rather, there seemed to me to be many beautiful words that had nothing to do with my life as it is now. Sure, they described aspects of my past life (for example, how I encountered the movement), but I didn't see anything for me in the present, and they didn't arouse in me a question or a need. So I re-read the text of your last School of Community, the one from December 16th, when, in responding to a contribution, you said that it is possible to read one thing but then verify another, which means that we don't verify faith or Christ, but our own attempts. That passage gave me a jolt, because I realized that this was exactly what I was doing while I was reading the pages of this School of Community. In fact, nothing spoke to me, so I asked myself, "How am I looking at everything? Just in light of the limits I see, or based on the promise that exists?" This already seems like a beginning to me, but I need a hand, because I realized that the Mystery is making me become aware of things that I didn't see before and that perhaps others too don't notice. The big risk is thinking that for me there is nothing more to discover here, now. Yet just thinking about this makes me tremble at the falsity of this statement. How do I safeguard in my heart all these things that make me suffer without letting them become a measure of how I look at the other person and at reality, but rather live them as an opportunity for a journey of true friendship? Thank you.

I wanted to start with your contribution because it can be useful for us to discover from within our experience what today's School of Community says. Even we who have been chosen, who live in a "dwelling place," in a house, can be at our own mercy and no longer understand. You said that there were "many beautiful words, but they had nothing to do with my life now." In fact, many times, as we said in the previous School of Community, we can read one thing but then verify another. That is why you felt the need for some help. What do we need? We need, as we can see, a place like this, where we can return without being shocked by anything, a place that is irreducible to our reductions and interpretations. I am moved by this constantly because it is the confirmation

of God's method. Everyone can see firsthand how they shift away from what they read in the School of Community. How does Christ respond—according to His design—to the difficulty you point out and in which we can all recognize ourselves in one way or another? Today's School of Community begins with, "The new self is born in Christ's gesture of choosing, which places it within the human companionship generated by His Spirit, i.e., into the Church. This election, this choice, always takes on a concrete historical form" (p. 70). To answer your questions—about how to keep all these things in your heart, how you can be helped, and how you can always find a hand that helps you—Christ puts you in a place, in a companionship generated by His Spirit. For what purpose does He put us in this place?

In studying the School of Community, I came across a dense and challenging text. I had to read it several times and I can say that I had just skimmed the surface, that I am only at the threshold of what Fr. Giussani wants to tell us. From the relationships and dynamics that emerge, it seems to me to be a path, a journey that goes increasingly deeper. For me it isn't an intellectual problem, but a matter of experience. I don't understand, I don't comprehend, because I don't live yet at the level that Fr. Giussani describes. Then, many questions arise: How can he say what he says? Who doesn't want that? Who wouldn't want to love like that, to look at the cross as a tremendously narrow path, yet one that leads to virginity? Everything is deeply desirable, but still far away for me. So, what path does Fr. Giussani suggest to me? If I am not mistaken, everything starts from an Event that happens, and "the fragrance of belonging" arises from remaining in the "essential bond" (p. 75). I ask you to help me better understand this because I want to live those things and I would like to know how to get there. What am I missing?

As you can see, if one reads the text from the experience that one is having, it begins to speak to us and becomes less challenging: "The mystery of God, which otherwise would have seemed very distant and abstract" (p. 71), has chosen to come closer through a method that allows us to better and more easily understand what He wants to say to us; that is, by helping us live as an experience what we sometimes feel is far away. In fact, as you said very well, it is not an intellectual problem, but a matter of experience. An explanation cannot replace experience. So, with this question in mind, we look again at the text of the School of Community: "Christ takes hold of man in Baptism; He makes him grow and become an adult. And in an encounter He causes him to experience the fact that a new human reality is close to him, one that corresponds, convinces, educates, and is creative, and that strikes him in some way" (ibid.). To understand the scope of these words, we must return to the content of the previous points, in which Fr. Giussani told us that we can perceive as foreign to us even Baptism, the most decisive fact of our lives. "In the hierarchy of values and interests that govern our life, there is normally nothing stranger than Baptism; yet nothing is more radically decisive" (p. 46). He added that Baptism can be "buried under a thick blanket of earth or in a tomb of forgetfulness" (p. 47). For this reason, we can forget and what is most radically decisive for our existence can feel foreign to us. How does God respond to your need that what you still see as distant can become yours? "In an encounter He causes him to experience the fact that a new human reality is close to him" (p. 71). An encounter makes possible what you wish to come true. An encounter that places us in a companionship, not any companionship, but rather in that "human companionship generated by His Spirit, i.e., [...] the Church" (p. 70). Only this companionship awakens a memory within us and makes it easier for us to recognize Christ. Fr.

Giussani links this observation to the point on which we will begin to work for next time: “The Movements make the Church a living home, alive, warm, full of light and word, of affectivity, of explanation, of answer. These are that unity of companionships created by the charisms” (p. 79). What a grace we have received! I can’t go a day without being overwhelmed with gratitude for this election that allows me to participate in the experience of the charism. It wasn’t a given that it would happen to me. That is why I am so grateful!

Here is how a friend of ours discovered this fact. She couldn’t connect this evening, so I will read her contribution: *“I wanted to thank you for these months of School of Community and for how in this difficult year you have never given up on challenging us to see the good that this situation could bring to our lives. I work in a small grocery store on a farm, and since the pandemic started, like so many other such stores, our work overwhelmed us, revolutionizing our days a bit. I accepted this challenge with great enthusiasm, but that didn’t spare me the drama of a life that can be empty, even if full of things to do. During these months, I met a lot of people who, stuck at home, came by the store maybe just to get a breath of fresh air or take a short walk. How much loneliness have I seen! Even I, although overwhelmed by a job I love, have experienced very often in these recent months this emptiness that I see in people’s faces, of which you have talked so much about. There is a lack that always comes out, even after a full day, that affects us more than anything else and that often knocks me out and makes me feel a great sadness. But how fortunate, what a grace, to have met the movement! Here is the foundation, the point I am clinging to and from which I begin again: the work of the School of Community and the life of the movement, this companionship for which I have never been so grateful, is strongly accompanying me. I can’t wish for anything else; who else cares so much about my life? Having the opportunity to meet Christ every morning is the only seed that can make my heart bloom again, it is what fills that lack and allows me to face the biggest dramas of my life. I haven’t found any other place in the world that faithfully recalls me to this. To have met the movement is the greatest gift I could have received.”*

This is the gift we have received so that we can make the journey we talked about earlier. As you said, “I haven’t found any other place in the world that faithfully recalls me to this”; that is, that encourages us to let Christ in as the only One who can bring our hearts back to life.

So what kind of companionship do we need?

I begin with a couple of passages from point 8 as the basis of a question that lately has become urgent: “An Other has led us to what is decisive for bringing us into the secure and definitive relationship with our Destiny. And the form of this encounter is a precise companionship whose beginning and development can be given a date [...]. This companionship established for us by Christ’s Spirit has a structure, a framework, precise parameters that define it” (pp. 72–73). In the last few months, with all that is happening, the companionship as I have always experienced it is becoming more and more separated from my life. There are no points of reference, the opportunities for building relationships are reduced to brief moments in which it is difficult to get to the bottom of issues, and there is a certain acceptance that dampens the enthusiasm associated with certain initiatives of the movement. On the other hand, I feel more strongly the company of the Mystery, of Christ, which is often more real to me than in the past. I am amazed at how His presence is so solid and formidable, not psychological, not just spiritual or ethical, but mainly as a bond that makes me feel good and able to savor this reality that, as we see, is complicated for

everyone. From this experience arises a question: Can Christ be lived in fullness even without this framework, without these precise parameters that define the companionship? The question remains, and the School of Community has made it stand out even more clearly.

In your opinion, during these months could you have discovered in yourself this powerful presence of Christ without a connection to this framework?

Absolutely not!

Perfect. Yet, as you can see, you can live the companionship established by Christ's Spirit—as the School of Community says—a companionship having this precise framework, without perceiving His presence, as happened to you in the past. Therefore, God used this circumstance to make you discover His presence even more consciously and you were able to recognize it precisely because of the connection you had with that framework. For many others, as we saw from the cover of *Time Magazine*, 2020 was a year to be erased, period! Instead, in this year you have grown in your awareness of His presence. That is why Christ introduced us to this living Christian companionship—because it continuously calls us back like no other place can.

But what do we need to be called back to?

During the past month I have been struck by seeing myself in action. A certain difficulty at home with my wife regarding the education of our children and the ongoing crisis of the pandemic affecting my work (and the associated concerns), caused me to become less faithful to doing systematic work on the School of Community. Within a short time (thirty days), I saw my way of looking at things, my desire to look for His signs, shrink up so quickly that it was very easy for me to notice it. Among the many signs of this, the most obvious was that when I was with my clients, who complain about the crisis, the government, etc., I was echoing those complaints. In short, in the end, as with any human experience, what matters is working on the School of Community, dedicating time and space to it. When we don't work on it, a very simple thing happens: we reverse the method He uses to meet us. Instead of striving to be surprised by what He wants to give me through reality, I try to evaluate reality on the basis of my ideas, even perhaps complaining that He no longer happens.

Do you see? When we look at ourselves in action, the content of our need immediately emerges in our consciousness. In fact, we realize that we are complaining like everyone else. It is from these realizations that you became aware of the value of a place like this, in which the Mystery has placed us: the fundamental contribution it gives us is to call us back to the method. As you said, many times we reverse the method. We need to work on this because otherwise—as the first contribution said—we can read one thing but then verify another. Why? Because we are so fragile that only if we take this personal work seriously can we make it our own. The charism, that is, the grace through which the Mystery introduced us to a relationship with Christ, is fundamentally a method. So, the work consists in making us aware of how we can avoid to end up complaining. When one begins to do this work, he immediately realizes where he lives the experience of being called back to the method.

In these recent months, I have begun to take the work of School of Community more seriously. This work came back to life at the invitation of a friend who had started a small group with three others. We have been friends since college and we have always kept in touch. Life is challenging for each

of us and for one reason or another we had all given up on our personal work on the School of Community. The beauty of this little group is that everyone does the work seriously and personally, and this is giving new life to our friendship. We are all quite “wrecked,” each with his own problems. All the drama of our lives is poured into the School of Community and we always challenge each other, being careful not to become a group in which we console each other or become nostalgic. There is a second fact that I would like to tell you about: in the last few days, after a check-up, I found out that my illness had progressed a little, and I was a little sad and gloomy. I was wondering, “Why am I so attached to life, to what I live, to what I have (a wonderful family)? What am I afraid to lose?” Reading the School of Community, I arrived at the last paragraph, “An Event continually generates a bond, a belonging, a different way of life, a new morality, a perfection that bears the fruit that collaborates in the earthly garden, the earthly paradise. Thus we have our part in bringing about God’s plan, in the explosion of the human glory of Christ in history” (p. 78). An Event marked my life and continues to mark it; it connects me to my daily life and gives it an intensity that makes it desirable to live it. I don’t want to abandon this. For one reason or another, your life and the lives of your friends are challenging, but you haven’t given up on the work we were talking about before. All the drama that the Mystery doesn’t spare us helps us discover the value of what He gives us. When they met Jesus, those who had an illness understood that the gift of His presence was the answer to their need. In the same way, the drama of these months has made you discover how His grace is worth more than life, making you understand that Christ has come to meet your need and that “God reveals Himself to His creature [...] in humanly understandable terms” (p. 72), in a place, in a dwelling place.

I ask you for help in living a passage in point 8 that I sense is important: “A dwelling place is like the coalescence of the companionship, of the community, of charity, in a real, day-to-day, spatial dimension. [...] This dwelling place can take two forms (p. 73)”: the family and the monastery. It seems to me that talking about only two kinds of dwelling places is restrictive. The horizon I experience in the companionship, which is comprised of the faces of my friends, is decisive for living my family life. For me, inside those faces, which are like a place and a home, there is a Presence that gives life and breath to everything, that comes even before my family. I depend on those faces for living an openness to the whole of reality and therefore also to my family. Seeing the companionship and the family sometimes lived as bubbles of protection from everything doesn’t fascinate me. So, I ask you: What is the relationship between the company provided by these faces and the family understood as a dwelling place? Thank you for the work we are doing. What you said is wonderful. It is restrictive to speak of only two kinds of dwelling places—family and monastery—only if we separate the points about the family and the monastery from what we read in the previous pages about the encounter, the companionship, the Church, and Baptism. All these things must be considered together to put the question you asked in the right context, an issue that will become clear in light of the point dedicated to the charism, on which we will work in the coming weeks. In fact, as the School of Community says, the family is the “original sign [...] the most decisive instrument for introducing us into the definitive relationship with destiny.” Therefore, “the encounter of man and woman cannot be defined exclusively by the aim of having children, but first and foremost by being companionship to Destiny” (pp. 73–74). When a man falls in love, he recognizes the woman—and vice versa—as the most esteemed presence that opens

him to totality: “Each identifies in the other the sign of the relationship with the whole [...] given by God to his or her life” (p. 74). Yet, to be able to live this relationship, it is necessary—as you said—to keep in mind the great dwelling place that is the Church, and within it, that dwelling place fixed by the Holy Spirit for each of us, which is the charism. That is why I totally understand your question.

So, what is the relationship between the companionship and the family?

There are connection issues with a friend who would like to speak, so I will read the contribution he sent, which will help us delve deeper into this issue:

“In recent weeks, after meeting with friends to work on the text of the School of Community, I found myself increasingly eager and full of desire (I haven’t experienced this intensity in a long time!) to do this work, so much so that, together with my wife, I went back to it often with amazement and gusto. In particular, I lingered on what is indicated as the forms of dwelling place, the family and the monastery. Reading what Fr. Giussani says a family should be, that is, “the space where the relationship with Christ is imprinted into all our actions [...] and that makes us builders of a new reality” (p. 77), I reflected on the fact that instead we often live in situations that are anything but this. This discrepancy I saw between what the text says and my experience forced me to ask myself again what this dwelling place is for me today; that is, whether it is truly the place where “you see the mystery of Christ present as a face,” and where “you learn precisely from the difficulties in the relationships [...] to see the mystery of Christ in the other person” (ibid.). I was inevitably forced to go back to what I said at the beginning, that is, to my amazement at wanting to do the work of the School of Community, to enjoy moments, situations, friends, and a story that has led me here like a riverbed does a river. Tell me if I am wrong, but it seems to me that, extending what the chapter says, the dwelling place is more than the family or the convent or the monastery or the house: the dwelling place is the whole story into which the Mystery placed me when, years ago, He had me encounter the movement.”

It might be restrictive to speak of family if we separate it from the whole context in which the School of Community puts the point. As I have already mentioned, we will see this even more clearly next time when we address point 9 on the charism. It is interesting to see this emerge from within our experience, as is happening today, because we have been given the movement in order to live the family.

The passage on the family struck me a lot because I recognized that every word was very true. When I got married, I had the desire to understand and I thought I knew what it meant to get married with an awareness of a greater meaning, to follow the path laid out by an Other. Yet, over the years (I have been married for eighteen years) I have realized that I had my own idea, my own project about what family meant. The more the years went by, the more I felt that everything was too confining for me. Everything seemed to me more and more a reason for an objection. Thankfully, though, I have always had great friends who helped me raise my eyes and keep going, and thanks above all to the work of the School of Community, everything changed little by little. Now I am aware that the words about the family in the School of Community are really living flesh for me, that is, they are really true. I understand that what was recently an objection is now my opportunity to make a journey. The husband who is not as I would like is the narrow path for me to go deeper into the true meaning of everything, and if I adopt this understanding, everything

flourishes. If I hadn't met this companionship, I don't even know if I would still be married, in the sense that everything would have been an objection, so maybe I would have quit. Instead, now I can look at my husband and at my children always recognizing a good, because I recognize Jesus in them, and I don't stop at the surface saying, "If my husband were different...", "If the children were different...", "If circumstances were different." Thus I can truly say that reality is perfect as it is because it is the way I can recognize Him, recognize Jesus. So, thank you for all the work you are having us do.

It is wonderful that each of us can recognize within his or her experience how many times we shift according to plan of ours that then becomes confining. Instead, by participating in the greater space in which the Mystery has placed us, by living within this larger companionship, things begin to become living flesh—as you said—and what was an objection becomes an opportunity to make a journey. We are not spared anything, but for us everything becomes greater. Over time, an objection becomes an opportunity, and within this new way of looking everything flourishes. Does everything flourish, including gratuitousness?

I am happy about what our friend just said because it is the start of an answer.

Perfect!

There is a point that I found difficult and caused me to ask myself many questions. I wanted to ask you if you could help me better understand what Fr. Giussani means when he mentions "gratuitousness" on p. 75 of the book. Also, what does it mean that I can stand before the betrayals of the other, the limits of the other? I read these pages with my limitations and the separation of my parents in mind, and I felt the urgent need for an answer to the question, "Can one really and totally face the other's limit, the other's mistake?" Because if this isn't the case, in the end marriage would really be just an effort to see who can endure the longest, to find the woman who makes you feel the most calm and serene.

Let's see if anyone can answer you from their experience.

During last Friday's School of Community, my group focused on this sentence in point 8: "You learn precisely from the difficulties in the relationships—enlightened by the judgment of His presence—to see the mystery of Christ in the other" (p. 77). I intuited what he meant and its scope, but it was never clearer to me than after what happened over the weekend. On Friday night, my husband and I had a discussion about the most difficult issue in our marriage, and I went to bed angry. Forgiveness was a distant memory and I felt incapable of doing anything. The next day it seemed to me that any hope of resolving the issue was completely gone. I spent the morning doing errands on my own—I wanted to isolate myself from the world and never see anyone again. Returning home, I was convinced that I would find my husband in the same condition. Instead, contrary to all my expectations, he had begun again—the discussion of the night before hadn't been an obstacle for him. This struck me deeply. Looking at him, I understood what Jesus was saying to me. Faced with my complete lack of strength to deal with the situation, He was telling me, "Look, I am the One who makes your relationship with your husband; I make your life, so stop bearing the weight of the world on your shoulders and let me do my work." This is the point: my relationship with my husband, even in our difficulties, became a real sign of the mystery of Christ

in my life, which made me begin again with a hope that I had not had for quite some time. Thank you.

Do you see? It is possible. Not through your energy, not through your ability to do things. That is why we started this School of Community by remembering how the Mystery introduced us to and put us in a place that makes possible what to us would seem impossible, as you just recounted. If we allow ourselves to be drawn in by His presence, little by little, as we said earlier, what was an objection becomes an opportunity, according to a design that is not ours. Sometimes we would like certain things to be resolved more quickly—we often want to dictate when a change occurs. Instead, only those who have the patience to give the Mystery time to work within a place like ours will be able to see flourishing the gratuitousness that to us seems impossible. Because it is impossible, friends, unless we are drawn in by the Mystery. That is why I am always amazed by what Fr. Giussani says when he talks about charity. We think that it is “our thing,” something that we can live by generating it on our own, while he begins from the initiative of the Mystery: “I have loved you with an everlasting love and had mercy on your nothingness” (cf. Jer 31:3). Charity is first and foremost an initiative of the Other, as we have seen from the beginning. Only if we experience it in this place in which Christ put us, at a certain point, “under the pressure of being moved” (L. Giussani, *Is it Possible to Live this Way?*, vol. 3, Charity, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal 2009, p. 27) because He treated us with charity (“God was moved by our nothingness. Not only that. God was moved by our betrayal, by our crude, forgetful, and treacherous poverty, by our pettiness.” Ibid., p. 16), can we also become capable of gratuitousness. It is impossible to be gratuitous on your own—you are all absolutely right. We can become more and more capable of this gratuitousness only because of the gratitude that overflows in us for what we have received from Christ in this place. We will be the first to be surprised by it because, as we heard today, what we didn’t expect has become possible: emerging from the gratuitousness in which it is immersed, your husband’s attitude amazed you, so much so that it gave new life to your relationship and your marriage. Yet, often we are in a hurry for things to happen according to the timing we dictate, and for this reason, the method of God makes us nervous because it is too gentle, too respectful of our human path and of our freedom. The point is that this is the most appropriate method for us, because if we had to make certain changes on our own, no one would be able to do it! That is why we cannot ask others to do what we cannot do. Only if we accept God’s method can we see an otherwise impossible gratuitousness happen in relationships, because “everything starts from an Event that happens, and “the fragrance of belonging ” is born from remaining in the “essential bond,” as this evening’s second contribution said: our friend wanted this to become hers, she wanted to reach the point of that gratuitousness of which you speak. If we have patience, we will get there little by little thanks to Him who introduces us to this experience: “In the home, in the family, amongst those friends, we continually meet [not only our limits, which we all can list well] the Event of that Presence which, when it is acknowledged, changes the way we look at [like your husband’s gaze changed] and feel ourselves and all things. In the house, you see the Mystery of Christ present as a face. You learn precisely from the difficulties in the relationships—enlightened by the judgment of His presence—to see the Mystery of Christ in the other person” (pp. 76-77). That is why it is always crucial—because of what has happened to us in our life—for us to give space to the promise that reached us when we encountered Christ in a living reality like the movement, so that it can fulfill the desire we have to live and see the mystery of Christ in the

relationships between us and in our families. This is the great promise that Christ made and continues to make to us, as documented by many of the witnesses we hear every time we are together.

School of Community. The next School of Community via video connection will be held on Wednesday, February 24th, at 9:00 p.m.

This month we will work on point 9 of the second chapter of *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, entitled “The Persuasive Way in Which the Holy Spirit Intervenes in History—Charism.”

Book of the month. The book of the month for February and March will be *Deserto: Il romanzo di Mosè* [Desert: The novel of Moses], by Jan Dobraczyński, published by Morcelliana.

Reading this book will accompany us through the time of Lent, helping us grasp the whole depth of the word “election,” which we have studied in the School of Community.

Meeting on Education. On the initiative of some of our friends who are teachers, on Saturday, January 30th at 9:00 p.m. there will be an online public meeting entitled, “Education: Communication of One’s Self—Growing and Help Others Grow During the Pandemic.” This will be a conversation with me on the many provocations that are emerging at this time, starting from the school situation and beyond. As we said at the last School of Community, the educational emergency affects all of us—it isn’t just for “professionals.” We are therefore all invited to participate and extend an invitation to anyone who may be interested. The meeting will be broadcast live on the CL’s YouTube channel to ensure that it can reach the widest possible audience. The flier, which can be downloaded and circulated through our social channels, will be available on the website beginning tomorrow.

Exercises of the Fraternity 2021. The Fraternity Exercises will be held on April 16–18 via video connection, due to the present health situation. The Exercises for Workers that were usually offered after the Fraternity Exercises to give everyone the opportunity to participate in the gesture will not be held this year. Given the exceptional situation, Fraternity members will be given the opportunity to invite friends who are not members of the Fraternity and to whom the Exercises for Workers would usually be offered.

In the coming weeks we will send information on how to register and participate in this gesture, both inside and outside of Italy.

The 2021 Drug Collection Day promoted by the Pharmaceutical Bank will take place from Tuesday, February 9th to Monday, February 15th.

I invite everyone to participate, first by donating medicines to participating pharmacies and then by offering his or her availability to take a shift as a volunteer. More information will be made available. I would like to point out in particular the need for volunteers on Saturday, February 13th. For information, please contact the point person of the Pharmaceutical Bank for your community, or refer to the website www.bancofarmaceutico.org.

Anniversary Masses for Fr. Giussani and Fraternity. As already communicated through the local secretariats, this year each community will evaluate whether and how to propose these Masses in accordance with local COVID regulations and in full agreement with its Bishop, always observing the utmost caution.

We offer what we may or may not be able to organize as an expression of our gratitude and personal entreaty to the Mystery that the “impossible correspondence” that happened and happens to us in the encounter with the movement always finds us amazed and glad, so that our fidelity to the charism can continue to grow.

Veni Sancte Spiritus.

Good evening everyone!