

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
via video connection from Milan, March 24, 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 3, points 1 and 2, "A New Protagonist in History," and "For the Human Glory of Christ," pp. 86–99.

- *What Wondrous Love is This?*
- *Il popolo canta (The people sing)*

Glory Be

Good evening everyone. We begin our work with the third chapter of the School of Community book, "A New People in History for the Human Glory of Christ." How did we discover the birth of a people?

Hello, Julián! After reading the passage in which Fr. Giussani says that a people is born from "a bond between persons created by an event that is perceived as decisive for its historical meaning" (p. 86), it struck me to see at school, where I teach philosophy, that even COVID-19 is unquestionably an event and not, as is often thought, an impediment to relationships between students. I seem to see between us during classes right now the possibility of an even stronger bond, of a true relationship, because we are all united, "embraced," we could say, by the same fact—this pandemic—that is so unsettling and confusing. Precisely because a people "is the joining together of rational beings associated in the agreed communion of the things it loves" (p. 87), it seems to me that the pandemic is unifying us and giving rise to a lesson of love between us, a friendship absolutely unthinkable before. It has revealed every possible bourgeois attitude, every superficiality, every distance in the professor-student relationship (which, however, to a certain extent rightly remains), making relationships true and showing how only a mutual passion for our destiny can unite us and can make us turn on the computer camera instead of minding our own business. As Fr. Giussani says, the factor of "the ideal" is emerging, perhaps not yet explicit or conscious, but it manifests itself as the confused intuition that clicking on that button to turn on the camera (in remote learning) is the only hope for something to happen, which for me has a very precise and irrefutable origin, and for them is, for the moment, the surprise of receiving a human sympathy. There is only one danger; namely, that "a civilization declines when it is no longer able to live up to the ideal that generated it" (p. 87).

It is surprising that to help us understand how a people is born, Fr. Giussani puts before us the example of two families who live in houses on stilts. He does not start from something abstract, but from something concrete that gradually generates unity—he says—between two families, then among five, then ten. This generation of unity grows, and this unity is a struggle for survival and, ultimately, a struggle to affirm life. It is something similar to the experience you recounted: when

faced with a need you find yourself united with students and colleagues in the struggle to affirm life, meaning that the time of the pandemic is not “against” all of you. The risk that the stilts could be swept away by the river makes people resist and look for a more suitable place to live. That is to say, the need to live generates a bond between strangers, making them into a people, not out of an agreement or a strategy, but out of a need. Then, precisely to respond to a need, they give themselves a common ideal and identify tools and means to achieve it, sustaining each other in mutual fidelity, helping each other to face the situation. All this leads to sharing a love for the things they love; that is, for their own lives.

A few weeks ago I was talking with a friend of mine in the courtyard of the university (he is studying philosophy and I study modern literature) about his thesis and he was telling me about Plato. Then we moved from the topic of his thesis to the diakonia we had participated in the day before with the students of our university. At one point, we saw another student (I noticed him out of the corner of my eye) who approached us, stopped, and said, “Sorry, guys, if I am disturbing you. I only interrupt you because I heard you talking about philosophy. I am a freshman studying philosophy and I have never heard people speaking about it like this, which I find quite interesting. I am dealing with fellow students who are focused only on passing the exam, or in any case on being prepared for the day of the exam, while it seemed to me that you were speaking about philosophy as friends, that you are close to each other; this makes me want speak with you about philosophy.” The conversation was very simple; we exchanged phone numbers and had lunch together the next day. It struck me in light of what we have read in the pages of the School of Community. I thought, “What did he perceive in our conversation?” Certainly he heard discussion of some topics that are very exciting—first of all for us—but he must also have heard people who are more capable or more experienced than us address those topics, although perhaps not with the same enthusiasm that affects all of life. In hearing us talk about philosophy, he must have grasped something that touched his need. Through philosophy, through a conversation he overheard, he must have perceived a person or a certain human way of speaking to each other that met his own need. This seems to me analogous to the reason that I became part of the people of God: I too, in partially different circumstances, heard someone who, in the way he spoke, in the way he studied, in the way he lived friendship, met my need.

I am struck by the connection you have made between what happened to this stranger and your experience, because it reminded me of what we have said in recent weeks: what we encountered, the experience we are living now puts us in a relationship with the origin of the history that has reached us. You were not there when this story began, but you can see in the present how it began without having to do who knows what kind of historical research! As I listened to you, I thought about how Fr. Giussani would have jumped in his chair hearing you speak because this is the reason he began this story—to respond to a need in a way that you too have recognized as pertinent to your life! This people was born to show that faith is pertinent to the needs of life, the needs of living. For this reason, if he heard you say this now, Fr. Giussani would exclaim: “This is the reason why I started what has now reached you!”

From this a unity is born, a relationship between the “I” of each person with his or her own need and the “we” that we meet along the way. For this reason, the question of the relationship between the “I” and the “we” emerges.

I begin from a passage from the chapter, “The unity of people who acknowledge Him in a particular environment, because they are linked with the communion of all those who believe in Christ present, has its effect on society, as the present, and on history, as the continuity of society . [...] Because of its very nature, this unity (whether it be of two or of two hundred million) has an effect on society even as regards politics, and on history as culture and civilization” (p. 92). I didn’t understand why Fr. Giussani links the unity between those who believe in Christ present with an impact on society and history. I have always thought of the impact of Christians on society as the consequence of many individual subjects who, generated by the community, bring to the world a difference that disrupts the environment and, God willing, changes it over time. That is why this emphasis on unity is a little jarring for me and why I would like to understand it better. How does what Fr. Giussani says apply to the workplace, for example? Does this mean that a recognizable presence of the Church is necessary for Christians to be able to influence a particular environment? If I think of the period of isolation that we have been forced to live, then the theme of the relationship between Christian unity and an impact on society seems even more difficult to understand. How can this unity manifest itself to the world if we cannot get together in person? How can we answer this question? How can this unity manifest itself to the world if we cannot get together physically?

Hello, Julián. Although I had already read it several times (perhaps superficially), I was struck when I reviewed it: “In this sense, the ‘we’ enters into the definition of the self. It is the people that defines the self’s destiny, its operative capacity and affective (and therefore fertile and creative) genius. If the people’s ‘we’ enters into the definition of the ‘I,’ then the ‘I’ reaches its greatest maturity, as acknowledgment of its personal destiny and as its overall affectivity, identifying itself with the life and ideal of the people”(p. 87). This gave me a start and was a provocation when I thought about my work in recent weeks, which restarted with remote learning and all its problems and resulting fatigue. The January 30 meeting on education and the School of Community provoked me, especially in front of the outlook of my students, several of whom were infected by the virus, along with their families. How should I face and deal with the pain of some classes so devastated by the virus? Reading this passage, I remembered what Fr. Giussani used to say about Saint Hermann the Cripple, quoting Martindale: “Not once in his life can he have been ‘comfortable’” (in L. Giussani, Why the Church?, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001, p. 220), and of the enormous creativity that his belonging to that “we” of the people who were his friends in the monastery generated in him. I told this story to my students, and I slowly saw many of their faces change; the resulting conversation was surprising. I asked, “What do you need to live?” One of them replied, “You need someone who loves you and never leaves you.” All the creativity that I can put into my work with my students is born and relaunched from within this belonging. I thought back to how many times I have taken for granted this “we” of the people that still defines my “I” today. However, by grace it is a present “we” that continues to bring me back and define my destiny even in these difficult circumstances in front of my students. Thank you because I understand more and more how the work of the School of Community helps me to recognize many aspects of beauty in my life that would otherwise be buried under boredom, fear, and nothingness.

As you can see, the “we” is always present. “If the people’s ‘we’ enters into the definition of the ‘I,’ [as you correctly recalled] then the ‘I’ reaches its greatest maturity, as acknowledgment of its personal destiny and as its overall affectivity, identifying itself with the life and ideal of the people” (p. 87). So, there is no “I” that belongs to a people like ours that doesn’t have the “we” within it. The example you gave of Saint Hermann the Cripple seems very significant to me. His “I,” with all the fragility that we know about (not even for an instant of his life could he have felt comfortable), was generated in such a way that an enormous creativity flourished in him, as we know, which in turn generated a people. Yet sometimes, when we think of the “I”—related to our work, for example, as you discussed—we think of it as something isolated. This is not the case, though. In fact you are working with a changed “I,” with an “I” that already has the “we” within it. So, the point is that “this unity (whether it be of two or two hundred million)” (p. 92) exists and has been documented in the world. But we often take for granted that my “I” is present only because there is a “we” that is present, continually recalling me and defining my destiny. The powerful fruitfulness of the works that you are all witnessing to is born out of that. There is no need for a particular genius or talent—it is enough to let oneself be generated by this place of belonging, a place that generates some “I”s with the “we” within them. This is so true that when that philosophy freshman heard our two friends talking in a certain way, he approached them, amazed by the newness they were carrying. Each of us, in order to be truly himself, cannot but show in everything he lives the “we” from which he is generated. The question is how we allow ourselves to be generated up to the point of carrying the “we” that is inside our “I” wherever we are, even if we are alone. If we find ourselves with our friends next to us, even better! But the “I” of each of us already has the “we” within it if we allow ourselves to be generated.

In this recent period, I have found myself living with aridity, getting up in the morning with all the weight of the day on my shoulders and feeling the Angelus slip away like water on glass, hearing all the words of the text of the School of Community as beautiful and precious but distant, not immediately able to affect my state of mind. But this week something is changing. I told my friends in my small group how I feel and their help brought to the surface the only point of the text that had managed to surprise me: “This yes [...] must arise from, stand upon, and build upon forgiveness, accepting it. Accepting forgiveness is perhaps what is most difficult, even though it is very simple” (p. 90). From a passage about forgiveness, I would have expected something like, “With the help of Jesus and of the companionship, we are able to forgive others,” something along those lines. I would never have expected this point about “accepting forgiveness,” especially because I already feel fine the way I am; I have nothing that needs to be forgiven, so ... But no! In the days after reading this something changed, in the sense that I have started to reconsider the things that happen to me and the people I meet as something that I need in order to live, something or someone who comes to me to help me get back to being glad, and not as things or people I need to defend myself from, as I often think. Accepting forgiveness implies accepting that I need to be corrected (because I am wrong) and ultimately to be forgiven. All this, though, does not happen peacefully, it does not involve a question resolved once and for all; in every moment (even today) I tend to feel okay and retreat into my safe haven, instead of accepting that I will open myself to His forgiveness and to the circumstances that present themselves in my daily life. Thank you, Fr. Julián.

Thanks to you! Who cannot recognize oneself in your description of feeling arid, of the weight of the day, of the Angelus that slips away and of hearing the words we read as distant or not affecting our lives? But everything changed when you accepted—felt the need—to be forgiven, corrected, and then you began to blossom. Without this experience of forgiveness there is no possibility of a true and lasting relationship with anything! Therefore we understand why accepting this forgiveness is the origin—says Fr. Giussani—of a people: “There is a page of the Gospel that existentially documents the new People bursting into history, with the new task of belonging to Christ and of taking part in his mission” (p. 89). Who among us would have thought of the page that Fr. Giussani had in mind? Who would have connected the origin of the new people to the yes of St. Peter; that is, to allowing oneself to be forgiven and therefore generated by all the passion of Christ for our life? “Peter’s yes to Christ,” says Fr. Giussani, “opens a connection between a person’s vocation and God’s universal plan. What is this connection between the personal moment and the mysterious whole of God’s plan, and what does it produce?” (p. 89). It produces the people! Through Peter’s yes, Jesus expresses this connection by entrusting him with the care of his lambs, as if He were saying to him, “I will lead My flock through you.” This is how we too experience the triumph of Christ’s mercy for man and for each one of us. The ultimate terminal through which Christ continues to reach us with his mercy is the people born of Fr. Giussani’s charism: we can recognize that Christ is present because we are reached by Christ’s mercy for each of us!

Hi! I spent a few weeks in isolation because of the virus, during which time a desire exploded in me not to waste a second of the time that God gives to me. But, as often happens, the more I try, the more disastrous the results. One thing I sensed is that the discomfort and anguish that I normally feel when my life is defined by work and the rest of everyday life is the same as these mornings when I have to get out of bed not having a specific purpose. So then, it is not a matter of circumstance! I was struck by what a friend of mine wrote: “What makes life true life? We need a path, an education that allows us to do the work of reason, that allows us to give an adequate reason for what we see.” After a meeting of School of Community with my small group, I left feeling very nervous and hurt and measuring myself: “I am not like them, I don’t do the work they do, I am worth less than them.” Seeing the happiness in their faces bothered me, and I saw a chasm opening up within me. The absurd thing was that that very day I had received many gifts that had moved me, even as in the evening I was sad. This same friend had written to me, telling me to “look deeply at who you are and what you desire!” I went to bed angry, but the next morning I said to myself, “I won’t accept this! I don’t want to get lost in self-affirmation.” I called another friend who had made a contribution during our School of Community because I wanted to put my uneasiness in front of a “you.” A truly liberating conversation took place, full of a real embrace of my inadequacy, which melted me and made me remember again the gifts of the day before, including our School of Community! The next day I made another phone call to a friend whose birthday I had forgotten, and I offered her my sorrow for not having called her. She answered me, “Your sorrow is a road because now you are calling me!” I felt an immense gratitude because I am continually accompanied by the Lord through very specific faces; there is an overabundance of initiatives relating to my life and there is a gratuitous love. He comes to take hold of me right inside my limitations so that everything becomes a road, even my fluctuating emotions. He is happening for me, right now. This infinite love allows me to breathe. Thank you for allowing me

to put these facts before you tonight, and thank you for the great paternity that you continue to show us.

This is Christ's mercy for your destiny that has come to you through your various friends and that continually puts you back in motion, to the point that you felt an immense gratitude that made your whole person emerge. This is a belonging that—when we welcome it, says Fr. Giussani—gives rise to a new relationship with everything. Fr. Giussani says that “Peter’s yes is the beginning of a new relationship of the individual person with the whole of reality” (p. 89). Many times we ask ourselves, “Where will this new kind of relationship that we all desire come from?” Fr. Giussani replies that this newness comes from letting Christ enter our lives like Peter did!, The yes to Christ is the beginning of a new relationship of the individual person with all of reality. It is the beginning of a new relationship not only between the individual person and Jesus, but of a new relationship involving all of reality! Who would not like this new relationship to affect the relationship between man and woman, between parents and children, and to affect the way we educate, or look at the sky, or get up in the morning, or go to work, or look at or own limitations and doubts? All of this has to do with Jesus’s promise to make new every aspect of the living of our lives. We are unable to generate on our own the newness we need in order to be continually rebuilt. Let’s ask ourselves: How far does this newness reach?

In reading the School of Community with my small group, we came across Newman’s passage and we wanted to understand what the opening sentence means: “The Christian Church, as being a visible society, is necessarily a political power or party. It may be a party triumphant, or a party under persecution; but a party it must always must be, prior in existence to the civil institutions with which it is surrounded” (p. 92). What does this mean for each of us and for the movement in today’s cultural context? Thanks for your constant help on our journey.

Thanks to you! We have just said that from Simon’s yes a new relationship is born that involves all of reality, man and woman, parents and children, education, and work, and we can now add what you brought to our attention: politics. The people thus generated leaves nothing out. For this reason, Fr. Giussani comments on Newman’s writing by emphasizing that “a man seized by Christ, and therefore possessed by the life of the Church, must draw from there [that is, from this belonging]—throughout his whole life—the reasons, motives, and images for what he must do in all fields, even the political one” (L. Giussani, *Un Avvenimento nella Vita dell’Uomo* [An event in the life of man], Bur, Milan 2020, p. 247). What is described by Newman is an essential aspect of the Church. Belonging to the Church has to do with everything, even with social life and politics. Let’s see if someone’s experience offers some light to answer your question.

Hello, Julián. At the university, we had the elections of the representatives for CAD, the council that deals with teaching, for which you do not run as a candidate who is part of a list, but personally. You need to sign up to be able to run, and a few days ago a representative of a far left group came to me and said, “I think you have to run for this.” I asked him, “Why are you telling me this, given that you have always tried to oppose me at every turn?” He answered, “I am telling you this because I see that you are friends with people, and in my opinion we need someone on the CAD who looks at people like that.” The only thing he and I have in common is our love for physics and for the university, which is why I was so struck when he suggested this to me. I asked myself,

What has he seen that would cause him to make that suggestion? The School of Community came to my aid where it says, “The Christians’ responsibility is that of being what they have known, what has become part of their mind and heart. So we are responsible for being what we are, what we have been called to by Jesus in Baptism and in the encounter that made it blossom. Our responsibility is that of being friends according to the encounter we have had. And this friendship cannot fail to have its effect on the relationships that are formed in the family, at work, and in social and political life” (p. 94).

Belonging to this people of ours generates people like you, who live in front of political opponents in such a way that a student of the extreme left, when someone who cares about teaching is needed, and seeing how you handle relationships with others and that you are capable of being a friend, thinks that you would be the right person for this political task. This amazes me. What did he see that caused him to think, “I can trust this guy, so I want to encourage him to apply because it will be good for everyone, for the university and for our classmates”? He didn’t propose this to you without being aware of who you are or because he is your opponent, but precisely because he knows you, because he knows how much you are friends with others. This is just an example. It doesn’t address the entire issue, but documents the kind of contribution, of collaboration that we can offer to public life when we are generated as you have been generated. You contribute a love for your classmates in the university to the point of worrying about issues that concern them.

The same thing happens in friendship, as we read: “Our responsibility is that of being friends according to the encounter we have had” (p. 94). A friend sent a question about this.

Hi. In taking care of my mother, who has been bedridden for many years, I live a sort of “confinement.” One day I felt burdened to the point of saying that I couldn’t take it anymore, feeling all the injustice of life, because this situation forces me into a total dependence on the availability of other people to find time even for normal things like shopping, a doctor’s appointment, or going for a walk. Yet, a moment of remembering the happy faces of my special friends was enough for me, once again, to stop suppressing my infinite desire, a desire that is indispensable for making the journey toward the joy I want for myself. I told this to someone who, in good faith, invited me to consider my little desires so that I could avoid suffocating. I realized that I don’t need to be supported like that; in fact, my head is already full of wishes and when it is possible, I fulfil them. I need someone who helps me live at the level of my infinite desire! Many times, instead, I have the feeling that among us we distract ourselves from it. Not because infinite desire and finite desires are alternative options, but because infinite desire is, in fact, perceived as something not very concrete. So, I ask you to elaborate on two points. First: What does it mean “to be friends according to the encounter we have had” (p. 94)? Second: What is this “help each other to rediscover reality, to rediscover what is, to help each other look, touch, see, and feel everything [everything!] that is, so as to come to be able to say, ‘Only He is’” (p. 97)?

Who has discovered this “to be friends according to the encounter we have had”?

Good evening. Reading the School of Community this week struck me like few other times in my life. These are very strange months for me, with the weight of the world situation starting to make itself felt as a continuous fatigue in my days. Until now my family had been a fairly solid pillar in accompanying me, as well as the sporadic calls with friends. But can all of this really be enough?

The change was gradual. I slowly stopped contacting my friends and reading the School of Community became more and more burdensome, until I decided it was no longer worth it. The final outcome of all this was a desperate sense of a void echoing in each of my days, a constant search for distractions, for external emotional input. My days had become a constant juxtaposition of profound boredom and extreme anxiety. At the height of all of this, I found myself picking up the new chapter of the School of Community, almost out of need for one last irremovable shore. Two points turned me completely around. First, how the people, the totality of their companionship, the common striving toward the ideal, is described as what defines the life of the individual, who can only “be” thanks to his existence within the people. I recognize only now how much I have missed that. It opened me to a way of looking at the community that was new to me—a real way, I would say. I had never felt such a concrete need for companionship in my life. The answer about which companionship I needed exactly is right there, simple and clear-cut, because a casual companionship is not enough for certain things that the heart feels are lacking. The second point can probably be summed up with the phrase: “Presence is the characteristic of God’s being.” Here, right here in the world. This sentence is a slap in the face. Is it telling me that there is something that is always present, true, here and now? The text continues, “This is the human glory of Christ: His being here and now, the exhaustive meaning of everything, becoming tangible and possible to experience” (p. 97). After the slap of the previous sentence, this one is instead a fresh leap forward. This sentence is true also for me—when I read it I felt it was physically impossible for me to change even a comma. How could I deny that there, right there, my entire existence and the deep need of my heart are described? And so, simply, but actually very painfully, the question of the next Fraternity Exercises —“Is there hope?”—cannot remain unresolved, nor pasted on the wall with a nice post-it with the words “Christ” attached underneath as an answer. We all know how easily a gust of wind takes down a post-it! I want this question always and forever imprinted on my mornings so that I can, I hope, go to sleep every night giving an affirmative answer, not because of a superficial and naive positivity, but because of a recognition of a love that works incessantly in my life, waiting only for me. I have more and more affection for your company on this journey.

Thank you because with your witness you answered the question of how to be friends according to the encounter we have had. What you need is a companionship in which you can perceive the common striving toward the ideal. This is a friendship according to the encounter we have had because the encounter introduces the tension of never being satisfied, being constantly recalled from our distractions to throw ourselves more and more toward what we are made for, toward the fulfillment of the infinite desire for which the Mystery has created us. For this reason, satisfying small desires is not enough to feel at ease, as you said. We need a companionship that lives up to our infinite desire and that reawakens it in me continuously through something real and concrete. This is the characteristic of God’s being, which instead often seems abstract. Here we come to the point that Fr. Giussani identifies: “The mortal danger in the Church today is abstractness (even in saying “Christ”); and you can build all the discourses you want on an abstract word” (p. 96). So the question is how we see the victory over this abstractness within ourselves.

A while ago, I started an internship experience at an association that deals with the welcoming of migrants, drug addicts, and homeless people. In addition to a few hours in the office, my tutor

suggested that I participate in the evening-night shifts. I ran into great sorrow and great abandonment. I met people with psychiatric illnesses and severe addictions. After my shift, I went home and I was happy. However, I also noticed something jarring within me: the meaning of facing the pain and sorrow of others and that of my moving around and being busy were not clear to me. I felt a disproportion between myself and that imposing presence of pain and sorrow; it was a disturbing disproportion. The next day—this is the second important fact—I attended the funeral of the sister of a great friend of mine who had a severe disability that had forced her into a wheelchair and required her to be assisted with all of her needs. There, something huge happened for my life, which also illuminated the experience of the previous evening. I realized that, after all, it makes no sense to extend oneself to others without being aware of the purpose for which that family had taken such great care of that girl; that is, the presence of the Mystery that inhabits the world. Did the Mystery really become flesh? The natural response that came from my heart was that, yes, I was experiencing a new world inside the usual world. I lived that hour at Mass as I had never lived anything else, really nothing else! Something happened that disrupted my way of looking at the world. I have found that I want to serve the world in the same way that her family took care of her. She was—and is—the sign of the Mystery among us, and only for this reason could her family look at her like that. From this experience, a new sense of disproportion was born in me, which was however totally different from that of the evening before. A desire was born in me to deepen the meaning of what I experienced that day. This also gave rise to a desire to treat the world well because it is created. Walking around the city the next day, I realized that I didn't want to throw on the ground a small piece of paper I had in my hand, and I felt silly thinking that living more deeply what I have experienced cannot pass through things so futile! Instead, I felt that, in a mysterious way, it was also passing through that little gesture of awareness. In the evening I had a great desire—for the first time so clear—to follow this place that is the Church, which I met through some friends. I was struck by reading in the *School of Community* text that “the glory of Jesus is a fact of this world, not of the next world,” and that “a man of two thousand years ago cannot be present here; if He is present here then He is God” (pp. 95 and 97). I am struck by the fact that I say these things because before the other day I would not have understood them and I would have been afraid to say them. But I experienced something that “seized” me. I realize that I am part of a story that brought me here. For me, this is a revolution and I wonder: How is it possible to live all things at the level of this discovery I have made?

The first question is to recognize what overcomes the abstractness we were talking about earlier. “What overcomes abstractness is only the present” (p. 96), something present. You saw it in the way that family treated their disabled daughter and then you perceived it clearly in the Mass: “It makes no sense to extend oneself to others without being aware of the purpose for which that family had taken such great care of that girl; that is, the presence of the Mystery that inhabits the world [...], a new world inside the usual world.” This reawakened all your desire to say yes to and follow this place that is the Church, by belonging to the place in which we all participate. Why? Because there the glory of Jesus is documented; it is a fact of this world, not of the next. Jesus is there because He is present, because He is present among us; and we see Him with such concreteness that we recognize Him present. You wonder, “How is it possible to live all things at the level of this discovery I have made?” What attentiveness one needs to have, what kind of work must be done in order to live with the awareness of the concreteness of Christ, so as

not to reduce Him to something abstract? Everything we are saying to each other this evening has this concreteness.

I quote, “Apart from the passion for the human glory of Christ, nothing can give joy to the heart with the slightest stability and balance” (p. 97). Regarding this step, during a meeting of School of Community someone asked us, “Do you have examples of this?” I realized that in the last year, starting from the first lockdown, I have grown a lot on this point. During the lockdown period, even with the restrictions and the things I could not do, I found myself with a strange serenity despite seeing people around me who felt dejected, who were gloomy and angry. I began to wonder about the origin of that serenity, and I was ready to find out that I feel like that because I am superficial and irresponsible. However, I slowly realized that that serenity was not due to my being irresponsible, but rather is the result of the journey I am making in small steps within this companionship. That serenity comes from an experience, and the important thing is to remember. For this reason, in a way that is mysterious to me, I found myself living the situation of the lockdown with serenity and also with curiosity. I wanted to find out what I could learn from that situation. I realized that I lived this experience in apparently so banal a way even when my parents were hospitalized with COVID-19. In particular, there was a night when my father was still at home with me in which I fully experienced my helplessness in the face of the situation. Day after day I realized that I had a serenity that came from the experience of the first lockdown. I would have been a fool to deny what I had experienced—I would have denied myself if I had denied the experience of a certainty born silently of many small facts that happened in my life. The only thing I could do was watch what was happening step by step. During these days I realized that I am totally helpless, yet this helplessness of mine was supported. Allow me to explain: what prevented this helplessness from crushing me was really the companionship (the sign of Someone greater who accompanies me and doesn’t abandon me) and the prayers of my friends. For me this is the experience of the passion for the human glory of Christ, which gives joy and stability to the heart in every circumstance. And I know that I may one day deny this experience, but I will never forget it.

Thank you. “How is it possible,” then, “to live all things at the level of this discovery?” asked the person who gave the previous contribution. Simply, as you said, the only thing to do is to watch what happens step by step, educating ourselves to this attention, so as to discover that our helplessness is also supported, and therefore that there is something real at work that makes you experience that the human glory of Christ is present. What makes it possible to live at the level of the discovery we have made is —to answer the question above—*memory*. But for us memory, as we have seen this evening, and as Fr. Giussani always taught us, is not just remembering something that happened in the past, but something that is present. All of you this evening have referred to real, present things: a love among us; a friendship that was previously unthinkable; hearing someone speak about philosophy with an unprecedented enthusiasm; the “we” within the definition of the “I,” which is thus enabled to reach its greatest maturity; creativity in the face of every circumstance (even remote learning); recognizing that His happening allows me to breathe; an immense gratitude for an overabundance of initiative in one’s life. We could stay here until midnight just remembering, letting the memory emerge of everything that documents how much being present is the characteristic of God’s being. As Saint Thomas says, quoted by Fr. Giussani, “The name ‘He who is’ means being in the present, and this corresponds in the most absolute way to God himself, whose being knows neither past nor future” (p. 97). But this presence documented itself even more clearly through the Word made flesh, present among us. Now, after having

listened to all these contributions, we can touch it firsthand. “What is present amongst us is Christ the incarnate Word, born of woman, died and risen” (p. 97). If we quote these words, these phrases, disconnected from the facts we have recounted, everything becomes abstract and the School of Community remains only a set of phrases that don’t touch us, something empty. Instead, it is the opposite: “A man of two thousand years ago cannot be present here; [and] if He is present here then [it is because] He is God. This is the glorification of Christ.” [!] “I acknowledge a Presence that is dominant, crucial. If this were not so, then it would not be present” (p. 97). That is why Fr. Giussani tells us the work we must do, the initiative that must be taken continuously: “We need to help each other [help each other, as friends] to rediscover reality, to rediscover what is, to help each other to look, touch, see, and feel everything that is, so as to come to be able say, ‘Only He is.’ This is the human glory of Christ: His being, here and now, the exhaustive meaning of everything, becoming tangible and possible to experience. If something were to remain outside of Christ, He would be nothing, because He would not be its Lord” (p. 97). The whole attempt of this story to which we belong is to educate us to recognize Him present. Fr. Giussani made a beautiful summary of what we are doing here as friends: we are here to help each other recognize Him present. This is memory, which introduces a continuous tension, a striving toward: we can remain “bestial as always before,” but we are “always struggling, always reaffirming, always resuming the march” (T.S. Eliot, *Choruses from “The Rock,”* in *Collected Poems 1909-1962* [London: Faber and Faber 1974], 175), following no other way because this is the only possibility for making—as we said before—life become true life.

School of Community. The next School of Community via video connection will be held on Wednesday, May 19th at 9:00 pm.

During this period we will work on point 3 of chapter 3: “A People Continually Destroyed and Rebuilt.” At the School of Community in May we will also work on the notes from the introduction to the Fraternity Exercises.

Fraternity Exercises. As you know, the Exercises will be held via video connection on the weekend of April 16–18. I remind you that the registration is open until April 12th. All the members of the Fraternity have received my letter and the instructions to register and participate: please read them both very carefully to prepare yourself adequately for the gesture, and do not wait until the last moment to register in order to facilitate the technical organization of the gesture. I also remind you that registration is personal and is required of each participant.

The secretariat has worked to offer a way to participate that is as simple as possible and within everyone’s reach. If participating in the Exercises in Rimini in person has been impossible for someone in the past, the video connection can make that person happy to finally be able to participate; others, instead, may have difficulties because they will be unable to handle the technical tools. Each person should do what he can, offering what he can or can’t do for the growth of his own and everyone else’s self-awareness.

Holy Week Gestures. As we said last month, all the adults of the movement are invited to consider the possibility of participating in the Way of the Cross via video connection as proposed by the CLU on the afternoon of Good Friday and, if possible, participate also in the other two moments of the Triduum, on Thursday morning and Friday morning. These gestures will be live-streamed on the Avvenimenti platform.

On Monday, March 29, the booklet with the songs and readings for the CLU Triduum will be available on the CL website, so that everyone can follow the gesture more attentively.

If your work and life circumstances make it possible, let's take advantage of this opportunity too! It is a great gift to be able to live the Passion of Jesus by identifying ourselves with the experience of the Easter Triduum as Fr. Giussani gave it to us, so that the affection for Christ, full of reasons, that fascinated us so much when we first encountered the movement may grow in us.

The Book of the Month for April and May will be: *Sulla soglia della coscienza: La libertà del cristiano secondo Paolo* (On the threshold of consciousness: The freedom of the Christian according to Paul), by Adrien Candiard, the EMI publisher. The text, also available in e-book, is a commentary on Paul's letter to Philemon. It helps us face many questions that provoke us today. It is an especially important reading to deepen what it means that Christianity is an event that offers itself to our freedom, and not just as a system of moral rules. We have repeated to each other on various occasions that "there is no access to truth without freedom." Reading this book is an opportunity to verify this again in our everyday life.

"He Who Seeks Will Find." This is the title of the new *Traces* subscription campaign, which begins in the next few days. In this dramatic year, we have given space to the questions that have exploded within us and everyone, and we have seen unpredictable events happen. The magazine is continuing to discuss them and is the simplest tool for rediscovering and communicating the treasures that we found. Until April 20, it will be possible to choose the "supporter" subscription at the special price of 40 euros. Remember that subscribing also helps to support the CL website and social channels.

Let's take advantage of Holy Week, during which we are all invited to identify with the days of the Passion of Jesus, to reach the celebration of Easter exploding with that joy and gladness that the risen Christ will communicate to us.

Happy Easter to all!
Thank you.