

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, November 19, 2014**

Reference text: J. Carrón, “I AM NOTHING WHEN YOU ARE NOT PRESENT,” Notes from the talks by Davide Prospero and Julian Carrón at the Beginning Day for adults and university students of CL, Mediolanum Forum, Assago, Milan (Italy), September 27, 2014, pp. I-XVI.

- *Barco Negro*
- *L’iniziativa*

Glory be

“I woke up shaking, thrown on the sand, but immediately your eyes told me that I was not ugly, and the sun penetrated into my heart.” We just listened to this. It is the first repercussion of reality that penetrates into the depths of our “I.” We can wake up trembling, feeling ugly, but other eyes tell me who I am, and then the sun penetrates into my heart. When someone comes and says that he left, only the certainty of that gaze can make one say, “They are crazy!” – but really crazy, because “I know, my love, that you never left. Everything around me continues to tell me that you are always with me” (“Barco Negro,” Portuguese *fado*, text by D. Mourão-Ferreira). Why? Why can we say that He is always with me, no matter what happens, no matter what thought comes into my mind, no matter what I think of myself? Because “I didn’t exist and He created me / I didn’t exist and He loved me / [...] He took the initiative / so why are we afraid?” (“L’iniziativa,” by C. Chieffo and M. Neri). The whole problem, the whole drama of living is this. Then, the journey that I need to make is so that this gaze can become more and more mine, this gaze that is the truth of who I am, the only truth of who I am – rather than the idea that I have, the image that I have, the feeling that I have. Because all of this is a consequence of the way in which I look at myself; it is the result of an incorrect judgment that I make about myself, radically incorrect, radically false, because “I didn’t exist and He loved me.”

However, repeating this is not enough – it needs to become mine. We know well that there is a gap between what one says and what he does, because it is this gaze, this desire, that becomes blurred and disappears. That is why we ended last time with a question that I had received by e-mail: “What does reawaken desire, expectation, vibrancy, in the routine that is often clouded by these dark, lifeless moments? Willing or not, we live reality, but what makes us live reality intensely day by day? Sometimes I would like to have a greater desire, but I cannot give it to myself.” Often we decide what should reawaken us even before we enter reality. Each of us, as soon as he wakes up in the morning, has an idea of what should reawaken him – and therefore, we have already decided that the majority of the things that happen to us will not reawaken us. Our starting point is almost by default, because we have already decided that certain things will never be able to reawaken us. On the contrary, Father Giussani introduces us to reality without letting us decide in

advance, because we don't know how the Mystery – which touches us through reality – can reach us throughout the day.

I wouldn't have been able to answer this question – “What does reawaken desire, expectation, vibrancy, in the routine that is often clouded by these dark, lifeless moments?” – until, two weeks ago, it happened that...

This is the point: we wouldn't be able to answer, but the Mystery, instead of giving us a lecture, makes something happen in front of us. “I wouldn't have been able to answer this question until, two weeks ago, it happened that...” What happened?

It happened that, by starting to live and to answer the provocations that life presented to me, my desire exploded again, breaking through all of the limitations and measures that I had built up around it. In fact, two weeks ago, while I was caught up in my self-imposed definition (that I am full of limits and incapable), a young woman in my class surprised a friend of mine and me by asking us if we belonged to CL. We were taken aback, because we could not understand what made her ask that question, but we went with it. We told her about ourselves, about our belonging to the Movement, and said that if she really wanted to get to know us, we could watch the DVD for the 60th anniversary of CL together, since it had been created to answer the question that she had. With great irony, God used us as His instrument. In fact, this young woman told us that she had wanted to get to know us because she had been struck by our peacefulness and love of life. Her desire continued, and led her to read and study the text of the Beginning Day systemically, to come and pray the Angelus on campus, and to come with us to School of Community. Her insatiable desire and her insistent need to understand her history as a Christian more deeply completely shattered my measure, and her hungry and curious gaze entered into me, too. I had read the Beginning Day text many times, but I had forgotten that life's greatest opportunity is to start to be amazed by simple and apparently small things. The encounter with this young woman reignited my desire to know and live with Christ, who had attracted her so powerfully, engaging her whole life. Even just the fact of agreeing to answer the seemingly inconvenient question of this classmate, without defending myself or running away, finally gave new life to me and to my desire to be amazed in every moment, instead of hiding in my “already known.” I am astonished that God gave me back my thirst for Him, that He started to talk to me again, just because I said “yes” to her.

“Her hungry and curious gaze entered into me, too.” The gaze of this young woman, whom she met unexpectedly, reignited desire to the point that it attracted her entire life; it gave new life to her own desire. You say, “I am astonished that God gave me back my thirst for Him.” How did He give it back to you? Through this unforeseen event, a detail of reality that can be (as in this case) something wonderful, or it can be something not so wonderful. Some people say that these things happen only when one looks at the mountains, or something beautiful, whereas when something bad happens, it doesn't speak to us, it doesn't reawaken. On the contrary...

On March 1, 2013, I had a car accident in which my mother died and I broke practically every part of my body. I had emergency surgery and spent several months in the hospital. From the first moments in which my friends came to visit, when I was in the ICU, the only thing I kept asking of them was, "Do not come here to console me with an attempt to erase the drama that I am living, because I need to keep this drama alive to become aware of Christ in the flesh." Moreover, at the beginning, I was trying my best to get out of the hospital as soon as possible – I was convinced that I had to live the reality that was in front of me, but for me, the reality with Christ was outside the hospital, where I was alone for five hours each day (especially at the beginning, when there were few visitors). The reality that I wanted was not there. For example, I remember the ordeal of trying to sit up in bed: I couldn't do it, and I would collapse on the bed. Once, there was a friend who was watching me as I struggled, and I told him, "Do you see? I do all that I can to assert myself over the reality that I am facing, but instead, I understand that Christ is calling me precisely there, with those five hours a day during which I am still and alone. It is through this, through the reality that is in front of me now, that God tells me who I am." As I spoke about this with a friend months later, he told me, "You are learning a method, a method for life – reality dictates the method, it is not you who imposes it on reality." With regard to this, it was crucial for me to follow the place where I had had the encounter that I recognized firsthand as true and essential, in order to be able to start again from the nothing that I had in that moment. For me, my drama was crucial, that is, the drama of my heart, the drama that originates from the fact that life is either vocation or nothing, either constant relationship with the initiative that Christ takes with you – with which He speaks to you through reality – or nothing. An example is that one morning, a few months ago, I woke up and I was finally serene. I thought, "I no longer have that restlessness that seizes me every morning." I calmly had breakfast, I left home to go to Mass, and after 10 minutes, I couldn't take it any longer and, to my great surprise, I started to ask to have that urgency in my heart again, that urgent desire to live, my original desire (since I am a human being) that my life be fulfilled. Because I had affirmed, I had met the One who had answered and was answering this original urgent desire. I am moved by the realization that I am following. The sale of Tracce moved me, because I thought: What a grace to have someone who provokes and accompanies us to become aware and affirm together in front of the whole world what has taken hold of our life, what is worth living for, what we are living for! How moving it is for me to participate, as part of the community, in all of the gestures that are proposed, because, independently of the awareness of those present, I realize that I am with someone who longs for Christ like me, with whom I can discover Christ. How moving it is for me to start the morning, sometimes struck by my nothingness as I read the School of Community, and rediscover that I am facing the fact that Christ asks me, in the circumstance that I have in front of me, to be the object and the instrument of His love for the world. I am thinking of a college classmate whom I met in September, and to whom I gave Tracce: we kept each other company to the point that he wanted to share the gesture of charitable work with me, and then he started to participate in other gestures, too. Last summer, a friend of mine was asking, "Why do you live like this? When will you ever settle down in your life?" I answered

him, “Do you see? Until two years ago, I would have fought to be independent even with regard to faith, whereas today I cannot live without depending totally on Christ.” I cannot count the times that I didn’t do what I was called to do (there are definitely a lot of them), and how many times I don’t do it, and how many times I will not do it – but I cannot live without the desire to be able to affirm Him in every instant and in every circumstance, realizing how He prefers me in every instant and in every circumstance. My “yes” is still imperfect, moment by moment, but I know in Whom I consist, and I know the value of my following.

The Lord makes us learn a method through what happens to us. It is reality that dictates the method to us, as Fr. Giussani told us from the first chapter of *The Religious Sense*. However, for us, this is like a premise that we then forget, and we decide on our own what reality is and what the method for living it is. However, when something like what our friend recounted happens, it is precisely there that, mysteriously, we start to really learn the method for living. A moment before, one was seeking independence, he was looking for reality where he thought it was (Christ was supposed to be outside the hospital, not inside), that is, beside real life. Instead, a moment later, he discovers that Christ is precisely there where He put us.

In our ward, a patient of ours, for whom I had a great affection, took a turn for the worse, and this sort of determined everyone’s mood. It was a notable fact, also because it was very dramatic. I felt personally involved in this matter because of my relationship with her. I lived all of this as I worked shifts with a coworker who is a bit tired of our work, tired of life in general, angry and always complaining about Christianity. One day, we had finished our shift and were smoking a last cigarette before going home when he asked me, “Why do you love like that? I want you to teach me to love like you do.” I was struck, because I realized that I had wondered about my relationship with my coworkers many times (even with regard to the DVD of CL and many other things), but this episode highlighted the fact that the link, the bridge, between what happened to me and the person whom I have in front of me, is me! It is me, me as need. I don’t know why he asked me that question precisely in that moment, I really don’t, so much so that I was speechless. In the subsequent days, we continued to work together, and I don’t know what the outcome of this will be. However, for me, the repercussion was first of all to recognize that I could be reborn within this circumstance, because a question like this has to do with my own need.

It is another who sometimes – as in this case – reawakens us to ourselves in this totally unexpected way, after seeing our way of staying in reality. We are telling each other this, not in order to be content or to praise ourselves, but to recognize that the very fact of being asked such a question reawakens us.

In doing the work on the School of Community, I also started from the question that you had asked us: How can we live reality intensely, day by day? What does reawaken our desire? In looking at myself in action, I could see that everything is truer when I approach things by starting from Christ, that is, with the awareness of not being alone because Christ is with me. Christ: that beauty that

entered into my life more than 30 years ago, and that still happens again now, in following you. Desire is truly reawakened by following, by following what the Church and the Movement indicate to me. Christ is calling me, here and now, through our companionship, and so, in ways that are almost always unforeseen and unpredictable, my relationship with Him becomes more solid, it is cemented, so that now I can say that I never – never! – feel abandoned by Him. I can begin again only in Him and from Him, because there are always dark moments in a day, but the light to look at is always there. It is really the memory of Christ that causes me to face things differently. If I think of my story, saying these things now gives me goose bumps – because five years ago, when my sister died tragically, I was just angry at Christ because He had permitted her death, He had taken her away from me. However, it was precisely this circumstance, which was so painful, that cornered me and forced me to verify whether Christ really helps us to live – that is, if He helps me to live, in particular, such a terrible and heart-rending sorrow. Anything can happen to me now, as it has in the past years, but I am so certain of Christ that I no longer fear anything. They can take everything away from me, but not Christ; He can longer be taken away from my life, because He lives in me, in my “I,” which is made new and certain by His presence. As Fr. Giussani always says, too, the companionship is in the “I”; there isn’t a single thing that we do on our own. I am having precisely the experience that my sister described in her last letter, before facing a surgery that ended badly: “Jesus dwells in my life.” For months, I wondered: Is this true for me, too? Does Jesus dwell in my life? Now I can say yes, because everything that I live is truly to give glory to Him whom I recognize as the meaning of my life. I continue on this road, this “beautiful road,” because by following, I learn to live with Christ – and this makes me grow, certain that everything becomes more and more mine, certain that Christ happens again by following, that is, by deciding to stay on this path.

As we can see, the response that emerges from the experiences that we have heard is that what reawakens our desire is the unforeseen and unpredictable way through which, little by little, our certainty in Christ grows. Therefore, we can always start from this memory, which is not a fact of the past, because we can no longer tear it away from ourselves. This is the outcome that Christ brings into our life: we are spared nothing, but the Christian “I” is a different “I,” an “I” where everything is inhabited by that presence that no one can tear away from us now. This is what we offer to the world, what we put in front of everyone, in the way in which we stay in reality. Then, what reawakens us can be reality (in its many ways) or the memory of Christ. One person asks in an e-mail, “As I worked on the text again, and especially in living everyday life, I recognized the value of circumstances as a guide to the concrete and stable experience of Christ – but at the same time, it seems to me that circumstances are not enough. Christ is present, the circumstances are present, but I get lost. I have my family, my job, friends, circumstances, and normal problems, but the ‘illogical,’ or perhaps logical, joy often goes down the drain. So, what is missing?” What is missing?

At the last School of Community, I was struck by the observation that you made about the “famous but” and the “but then,” because ultimately I have always followed School of Community, and I have always been convinced that I agreed and understood. However, as I was going out the door, the “famous but” and the “but then”...

...Were coming back in through the window!

Yes. So I tried to answer the questions that you posed to us at the end of the last School of Community. This is the experience that I have had in the last few years of my attempts along this journey. I remember that, in first grade, I was kicking the stones in the street, wondering why I couldn't be like them: carefree and without problems. As the years went by, many painful and dramatic things happened: my mother's death when I was little more than a child, the sorrow of my sister because she cannot have children, my brother being upset about a tumor, the therapy that my father is undergoing for cancer, which doesn't look promising. If I summed all of this up, it is clear that things wouldn't add up, and I would be left, as always, with a pietistic religious consolation – nice, but formal. Instead, the fact that things have never added up for me has constantly filled me with many questions about everything, and I have always been afraid of not being able to find an answer. Therefore, I ended up eliminating and suppressing the questions, thinking that either I was not functioning properly, or my circumstances were too ugly.

Do you understand? “Either I was not functioning properly, or my circumstances were too ugly.” The consequence of this is that things don't add up, and in the end we are left with just a “pietistic religious consolation – nice, but formal.” As the question that I just quoted said, “Christ is present, the circumstances are present, but I get lost.” We have everything, but I get lost. And so?

Then...

“Then!” Not “but then”... “Then!”

Then I saw you. I noticed – and this was what struck me the most – that not only do you have more questions than me about everything, but especially that you are not afraid of them. How is it possible? You are the responsible, etc. You should have answers! So now, living reality intensely means letting these questions explode every day, these questions that are more me than myself, that are my own nature, which I have always feared. The longing, the sadness, and the solitude accompany me every day, and not only do they not die out, but they increase with the passing of time, and therefore they have become dear to me. Not a day goes by in which at least one word that I heard, one thought that I opened myself to, one passage that I read, or one gaze that I caught, doesn't enter into my questions, shaking me up and making me desire to be again. I am no hero of the desire that I cannot give to myself, but I recognize when it is reawakened in me.

So, what is missing? What is faith often missing? The “I” is missing. Because it is not enough to say, “Christ is present.” It is not enough to say, “The circumstances are present.” I can get lost nevertheless. We said this in a passage of the 2009 Fraternity Exercises: “But how, then, if this witness is so patently clear, if we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, how is it that after a while we are once again lost, trapped in our emotions, suffocated in the circumstance? What we are missing today is not the Presence (we are surrounded by signs, by witnesses!): our humanity

is missing. If our humanity is not involved, the path of knowledge stops” (J. Carrón, “From Faith, the Method,” Fraternity Exercises 2009, p. 21). What does Christ do, then? What demonstrates that Christ is present and that Christ is really contributing to what I am missing? He makes us become aware that, in this way, things are not adding up. Things were not adding up for me, either, and I had plenty of religious consolation – since I had entered the seminary when I was 10 years old, I had all the consolation I wanted. But things were not adding up. I understand it perfectly – that is why I know perfectly well what was missing – and I always told you that I thank Fr. Giussani because, from the day that I met him, he allowed me to make a human journey that involves my “I” in my journey, causing me to take the questions seriously (because the question is an essential part of the journey). That is why I am less afraid of the questions now – instead, I consider them a friend. Wherever it comes from, jumps out from, originates, a question is always something that makes me begin to search for an answer again. Without the questions, Christ would remain a “mere name,” says Fr. Giussani, but often we want to spare ourselves precisely this! The result is a faith that is formal, a faith that then leaves us speechless in front of things. This doesn’t mean that the Mystery is relentlessly against us. Everything that happens to us – Fr. Giussani always told us – is for our maturity, that is, so that our “I” may gain more and more substance. This substance is what really surprises people in reality today, as the question posed to the friend who spoke earlier witnesses to us: “Why do you love like that?” Why is it possible to stay in reality like this? Everyone offers plenty of religious discourses, including us. However, what we need, and what the others need, is to encounter someone in whom something that reawakens desire again is happening. This is possible.

I would like to share my experience with you, and my encounter with the Movement. It was an ordinary Tuesday, and I was walking home. At a certain point, after I had crossed a street, a young man stopped me, asking me to listen to him for a few minutes. What did he want from me? He simply wanted a few minutes of my time, and I asked myself: Why say no to him? He started to tell me how much Communion and Liberation had changed his life, how much Christianity and the presence of God were important for living his daily life fully. Through the intensity of his phrases, the more he spoke to me, the more he looked me in the eyes, the more I realized how much I had lost the vital energy of my existence lately. On that day, that young man gave me Tracce, which, on the surface, is a magazine like many others. However, as I started to read the witnesses, my heart understood once more what amazement, fullness, and awe are. I told myself: They are just words, simple words, why do they strike me so much? The DVD for the 60th anniversary of the Movement came with the magazine. As I watched it, I started to understand what the Movement of Communion and Liberation consists of: something that struck me deeply within, but that wasn’t yet completely clear to me. A few days later, I spoke of my doubts and asked my many questions to that young man, who, in the attempt to bring me to the concrete and true experience, invited me to participate in School of Community. I won’t deny that, from the moment in which I heard those wonderful people recount facts from their lives and daily circumstances, I immediately realized

how much my own world had been immobile until that moment. Also, it was very moving to hear that young man say how much our encounter had been a provocation for him, because it had allowed him to rediscover the beauty of the gift that he had been given. Since the day that I met him and all of his wonderful friends, whom I now consider my friends as well, I started to perceive the presence of God in my life again, stronger than ever, and I started to encounter Him again, when I am alone or together with them. I can only thank Him for having permitted me to be part of this world, for having allowed me to stand in the front row at the beginning of this new path that is my life with all of you. Now I wake up in the morning with a purpose, with the desire to enjoy the presence of God in every moment of my day, and with the immense energy that makes me want to encounter all of them every day, in order to be able to tell them every single thing that amazes me and provokes every instant of my life.

Thank you, my dear. The proposal of a gesture like selling *Tracce* with the attached DVD made that young man rediscover beauty for himself as he saw what was happening in her. A university student was telling me something similar. He had met and invited a young Muslim man to watch the DVD, and at the end, that young man said, “I didn’t know that something like this existed, I had not realized that something like this could exist. The world should know about this!” We have the witness of many people who say thank you like this, and not because we are clever, but because we share with others the Event that has taken hold of us. This is the journey that we have made in the past month, thanks to the sale of *Tracce*, which made every person who participated experience an enormous opportunity to witness to others what has happened to us. For example, a person told me that he watched the DVD with one of his colleagues who had always been against the Movement, due to an experience that he had had with some of us in the past. However, after the DVD, he had to admit, “Things don’t add up here. I saw something different that I hadn’t imagined.” The newness that entered this person, who had and could have many things for which to blame us, was not the fruit of a discussion, but of seeing the life of many of us who – with all of the limits we are aware of having – tried to share the Event with others. Therefore, at the end of this period of commitment to the sale of *Tracce* and the attached DVD, we really need to become aware of what happened, so that it doesn’t remain a gesture that has not been judged, that is, an experience that we don’t treasure. In the past year, we often wondered: What is presence? How can we be present in a historical situation like ours? Here it is – we have seen that it’s not so complicated, because so many people were struck and taken by surprise by the beauty of what they saw as a path that is possible for them, too – as they faced a humanity that they would also like to have for themselves. Something unforeseen happened to us, too, as we were often asking: How can we communicate what happened to us? It was easy, precisely as Fr. Giussani always described it: it is something that comes before any other explanation. It can all be summarized in that phrase of *Something that Comes First*: “The event of Christ becomes present ‘now’ in a phenomenon of different humanity: a man runs up against you and discovers in you a new presentiment of life, something that increases his chance of certainty, of positivity, of hope and of usefulness in living” (L. Giussani, “Something that Comes First,” *Tracce*, no.10/2008, p. 1). It is simple. As is clear in

the DVD, the language of the fact is a witness, a newness of life that is visible, a desirable human experience. Therefore, in communicating it to others, we were also surprised by what we have, by the grace that has been given to us. Our new friend was just saying this: she was amazed by the fact that the young man she had met became aware of what he had in communicating it to her. Faith grows by giving it; it grows by witnessing it. We are the first to benefit from the gestures we propose to ourselves. So many of you witnessed to this in the many letters that arrived regarding the work of selling *Tracce* and the circulation of the DVD, gathering to watch it together with neighbors, the people of your apartment complex, your colleagues, your friends. We were the first to benefit, gaining awareness of what had happened to us. How did the Mystery renew the gift? Not by making a speech, but through the flesh and blood of the change that happened in others, through the amazement of new words full of meaning. We had reasons to commit to this gesture because of what had happened to us, and we saw how this commitment produced the fruit of gaining even more reasons! “For many very valid reasons, I had decided that I was not available to sell *Tracce*. However, my pastor approached me and asked us to present the gesture at the end of Mass. I thought: Why me, can’t someone else do it? The night before this invitation from my pastor, at School of Community, we had been reminded to live that gesture, witnessing what being in the Movement meant to us: I am the Movement, I am *Tracce*. I had let it slide, thinking that it didn’t concern me. However, at that point, I had to leave a crack open for the Mystery, so that He could enter into my heart. So I said “yes,” and for the first time, I started to ask myself why I value School of Community, the Movement, being a Christian. I rediscovered that I am on this path within the Church because I have been called, chosen; I feel preferred, and I am happy to be a Christian. Thus, I asked the assembly of the faithful in church to share this joy with me by buying *Tracce*. The method is precisely to stay in front of reality before defending ourselves from it, with the amazement of the child who says, ‘Oooh!’ in front of something unexpected.” This is in no way an attempt at self-praise; the DVD didn’t allow any self-praise. As Davide Prospero said during a meeting, “Watching the DVD meant being in front of a Presence that somehow judges you, in a positive sense. It didn’t leave us indifferent [one feels that he is challenged with regard to what he lives]. In what sense does it judge us? In front of someone who is telling you something beautiful, or who makes you see that there is someone who does great things, you immediately experience the desire for a fullness of life that is shown as already in action in a human reality that has many faces, many aspects, but a recognizable theme – in Asia as well as in America or Australia. You also see that, in truth, the same thing is happening though different faces. A person who had lived on the fringes of the Movement for years, in watching the DVD, told me, ‘What did I miss in these years?!’ This is striking in its simplicity, because it means that one perceives the judgment on his life as a possibility. In this sense, it is a positive judgment, a judgment that opens desire wide, that doesn’t leave us indifferent, that doesn’t leave us with just an aesthetical appreciation, but that reawakens all of our desire for a ‘more,’ because one feels judged by a Presence.” This is the invitation with which Christ calls us again, with which He has pity on each of us. For this reason, participating in a gesture like this has brought an unexpected richness to many of us. I wish that

each of us could treasure this, because all of the gestures that we propose, and all of the proposals that we make, have only this purpose. In this way, by always offering this possibility, we don't let ourselves settle down.

Therefore, for the next School of Community, we will go over the last part of the Beginning Day. Today we have seen how everything is played out in the drama of living. Thus, I propose that you keep the parable of the prodigal son in mind this month. In this parable, we see how the son had been given reality, a reality that was good, all good: a father, a home, material riches. Everything was positive, but it wasn't enough. And just think that man was created by God, not in a home like that of the prodigal son, but in the Garden of Eden, where the Father was walking with him every evening! However, since man was created free, he had to decide to accept Him, to open his heart to Him – because one cannot have access to truth unless it is through freedom. And yet, we often find that what has been given to us is not enough, just as the prodigal son felt that his home was constricting, and thus decided to leave it in order to follow an image of fulfillment that was different from the one that had been given to him. He decided to follow a reduced idea of the need of his “I.” So the Father let him go, and the great adventure of life began. How much time is necessary to really understand what our need is, and thus to be able to rediscover the grace of having a Father? That is why I will re-propose some questions to you. What path did your freedom have to travel in order to discover the truth? Where could you discover some pieces of truth, some aspects of living, through what happened to you in life? As we have seen, nothing is automatic. Nothing is automatic, because God doesn't want anything to be automatic. The father in the parable doesn't want a son who stays home out of formality, because, at a certain point, the son grows tired of it and leaves. Moreover, it's not enough to stay formally, as we can see in the attitude of the eldest son, who hasn't yet learned what it means to be a son, and therefore complains. I think that this is a question that we all have to keep in mind.

The next School of Community will be on Wednesday, December 17th at 9:30pm.

On **Saturday, November 29th**, we will have the **National Food Collection Day**. This is another gesture proposed to our freedom. Every year, we propose this gesture to everyone, along with supporting the **AVSI Tents** during the **Christmas season**. Why do we have these gestures? We need to recover the reasons, because nothing is automatic. Every generation has to recover the reasons, because these gestures started years ago, but we cannot coast through them; we always have to recover the reasons for them, as Pope Benedict XVI said, by living these gestures as educational opportunities to reawaken ourselves, as we saw with the sale of *Tracce*. So many people, in doing that gesture, had to discover the reasons for doing it, and they discovered them in the dialogue with others, or in what others said. Thus, these gestures are for us first of all, and not to resolve the problem of hunger – also because we wouldn't be able to resolve it. We cannot think that we will get by on our own, or with some strategy of volunteering. What we do with the Food Collection and the AVSI Tents is to give a small sign. Through these gestures, we become aware

of the nature of our need. Our need is to learn gratuitousness in every relationship, because we are interested in living this gratuitousness in our family, with our boyfriend or girlfriend, at work, in the community. That is why Fr. Giussani educated us to charitable work. By becoming aware of the nature of our human problem, we will be able to start to understand the grace that happened to us, as John Paul II said: “There will be no faithfulness [...] if a question is not found in man’s heart for which only God offers the answer or, rather, for which only God is the answer” (John Paul II, *Homily, Trip to the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and the Bahamas*, Mexico City, January 26, 1979). In this historical moment, when we touch the reduction of the “I” firsthand, proposing these gestures is something crucial for regaining our self-awareness. For this reason, we simultaneously answer a need and become aware of ourselves and our need. The contribution that we can make to those who, though they are not in the Movement, participate in the Food Collection and the AVSI Tents, is precisely that of being able to touch, at least in that moment, the “hem of the cloak” through those of us who live this gesture with the awareness that Fr. Giussani reawakened in us, and to which he educated us, through the gesture of charitable work.

The **Christmas Poster** is available, in both large and small format. There are two texts. The first is by Pope Francis: “For me, faith was born of an encounter with Jesus. It was a personal encounter that touched my heart and gave new direction and meaning to my life. It is not something external or imposed, but rather that which comes from within and is self-evident. Jesus, in fact, impacts us, shocks us, and renews us.”

The second is by Fr. Giussani: “It is an Other who takes initiative in our life, thus it is an Other who saves our life, leads it to the knowledge of truth, leads it to affection for what is true, leads it to love for reality. If you accept this announcement as a working hypothesis, then you return to breathing freely, everything becomes simpler, you say bread is bread and wine is wine, life is life and death is death, a friend is a friend, you become happier, and everything becomes even more of a reason for wonder. The more you seek to live this, the more you understand the disproportion and walk humbly, because this Other who intervenes catches me in every moment, catches me again and again, re-launches me, and will complete the work He began: He enables us to reach our destiny.”

We can find nothing more adequate for our present journey.

New dates for the Rimini Meeting. This is something new and historic, so pay attention! I invite you to note right away that the next Rimini Meeting will take place from **Thursday, August 20 to Wednesday, August 26, 2015**, ending at midnight.

Veni Sancte Spiritus