

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, December 17, 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.

- *E se domani*
- *Il figliol prodigo*

Glory Be

Who is crucial for us? Who is so crucial in our life that, with Mina’s words in the song that we just heard, we can say: If I were to lose you, “I would have lost the whole world, not just you”? Who can really answer this need of ours? Only someone who embodies the meaning of life so much that, without him, without his presence, I lose everything – I am bewildered, lost. This is what the prodigal son had to discover through a journey, a process in which his freedom had taken a certain direction. Our entire life is given to us in order to discover who is so crucial that, if we lose him, we lose the entire world.

I wanted to ask you two questions that emerged in the School of Community that I have with some friends. We realized that it was really necessary to talk to you, because the questions seem important in this specific moment. First question: in discussing the parable of the prodigal son, you mentioned Fr. Spadaro at the Rimini Meeting, who said, “We need to accompany the cultural and social processes, as ambiguous, difficult, and complex as they may be” (Le periferie dell’umano [Human Peripheries], A. Belloni and A. Savorana, editors, BUR, Milan 2014, p. 53). What can it mean for us, in this moment, to accompany the cultural and social processes? It is easier to understand what it means to accompany a person, but what does it mean to accompany a cultural and social process? And more specifically, are there processes, in this moment, that you think are more important for us to accompany, and that then become a sort of recommendation that you are making to all of us? The second question is on another topic, but it is somewhat related. It stems from what the Pope said at the Congress of Ecclesial Movements. Pope Francis exhorts us to “maintain the freshness of the charism [and not] to become hardened in set ways of doing things, which, while reassuring, are nonetheless sterile.” And he adds, “The newness of your experiences does not consist in methods or forms, [...] all of which are important, but rather in your willingness to respond with renewed enthusiasm to the Lord’s call.” And again, “If forms and methods become ends in themselves, they become ideological, removed from reality which is constantly developing” (Address to the Third World Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, November 22, 2014, 1). Therefore, we wondered: In this moment of our history, looking specifically at the Movement, do you identify any forms and methods that, by now, are far from reality, and thus distance us from it instead of helping us to stay in it? Or, from a positive perspective: What is the Lord’s call to our movement, what is He asking us now?

I think that such an important question really helps us to look at the context in which we are called to live our faith, in order to be able to accompany ourselves and others within the present circumstance. If I understand what Pope Francis says correctly, then it seems to me that he emphasizes that the world is constantly changing, at a speed that was unimaginable even a couple of decades ago. This is clear to everyone, along with the fact that we are all immersed in this rapid change. How can we live in this situation? The first question, I think, is to identify what the most crucial processes of our time are. In this sense – as I have already mentioned on other occasions this year – I have always found Benedict XVI’s judgment illuminating with regard to the great changes that started a few centuries ago, and the long process whose full consequences we see only now. He said, “At the time of the Enlightenment [...] an attempt was made to keep the essential values [of life] of morality outside the contradictions [as if to keep them on the margin of all ideological and religious discussions] and to seek for them an evidence [I am always struck by the fact that the Pope uses precisely this word, “evidence”] that would render them independent of the many divisions and uncertainties of the different philosophies and confessions,” because the attempt was “to ensure the basis of coexistence and, in general, the foundations of humanity. At that time, it was thought to be possible, as the great deep convictions created by Christianity to a large extent remained and seemed undeniable.” It seemed undeniable that this would have continued forever. I was struck by how lucidly Benedict XVI observes that “the search for such a reassuring certainty [...] has failed” (*L’Europa di Benedetto e la crisi delle culture [The Europe of Benedict and the Crisis of Cultures]*, LEV-Cantagalli, Rome-Siena 2005, pp. 61-62). By now, this is clear to everyone; it is an indisputable fact that we can recognize in every issue of life. That process generated a society more pluralistic than the one in which we were born, a society where everything is questioned, and where the great basic convictions are no longer shared. We see it in the family, education, society, relationships. It is a phenomenon that increasingly touches all aspects of life. In an interview on the occasion of the Synod, Cardinal Scola said, “The comparison with the sexual revolution is perhaps no less of a challenge than that issued by the Marxist revolution” during the upheaval of 1968 (*La Repubblica*, October 12, 2014). We are facing challenges that we couldn’t have imagined a while ago. With regard to the word used by Benedict XVI, Fr. Giussani, too, was already saying in 1987, “It is as if [today] there were no longer any real evidence except for trends” (*L’io rinasce in un incontro. 1986-1987 [The ‘I’ is Reborn in an Encounter]*, BUR, Milan 2010, pp. 181-182).

Therefore, we all find ourselves immersed in these processes. Many of our contemporaries (and also many of us, immersed up to our necks) have already made a journey in search of something, and some are already coming back, having verified that an ideology like Marxism no longer works, or that a certain way of living, from which they expected certain results, is no longer adequate. We have seen this witnessed by many well-known personages who presented the book *Vita di Don Giussani [Life of Fr. Giussani]*. These are people with a mentality different from ours, coming from other contexts, from totally different positions, who, in reading the book, in seeing how Fr. Giussani lived certain processes, found some help, a light, or – to use Fr. Spadaro’s word – a “torch.” How were we accompanied by Fr. Giussani in living the social and cultural processes? What impact did we have on them? It was to the extent in which we were helped to live, and to not lose our way in the face of all of the changes. We recalled this in the first lesson of the Fraternity Exercises, when I referred to what had happened in 1968, so that it could help us to face the current challenge with regard to certain rights or the sexual revolution (as it was for the Marxist revolution back then). These are challenges that we are all facing – not to mention education, which is a

challenge that is every bit as crucial. How can we accompany ourselves and others in all of these processes? What did Fr. Giussani do? How did he accompany us? By generating a subject able to resist being dragged along by these processes, without continuously losing its way; a subject who would be helped by all of this to make a journey. There are some ways of responding that proved to be inadequate. For example, it is clear that, in the face of the collapse of certain evidences, it is not enough – as Cardinal Scola also said – to repeat a correct discourse: “It is also thought, according to a certain ethical intellectualism, that the only problem is to learn the correct doctrine and then apply it to life: ‘The authentic doctrine, once proclaimed, will win’” (*Tracce*, no. 8/2014, p. 31). This no longer works, as we well see. Fr. Giussani always told us that formal repetition of the truth is not enough for one to believe it and make it his own. That is why I am so struck by the journey of the prodigal son, because he knew certain things – just as we knew them, and just as many of our contemporaries received them from the Church – but all of this did not stop the process for which today “there is no longer any real evidence.” Only one who has made a journey, only one who has had a personal experience within these processes will be able to accompany others in living them without bewilderment, because we can communicate to others only what each of us has already acquired as experience. However, at times, it seems that insisting on this personal journey that each of us has to make is excessive and inadequate with respect to certain processes. But this was not Fr. Giussani’s opinion. I was struck by the fact that, just two days after the occupation of the Catholic University in Milan – November 19, 1967, two days later! – at a retreat of the *Memores Domini*, he said that what took place had happened because the university students belonging to the Movement had not sought the Lord day and night, and this did not give them adequate intelligence to face those processes: “‘Thus, the intelligence of the situation and of the things to do – which is a different, more acute intelligence, because it is an intelligence dictated by God’s point of view – was so easily lacking because we do not wait for God day and night.’ In fact, ‘If we had been waiting for God day and night, then our attitude in sharing life at the Catholic University would have been different’” (*Vita di Don Giussani [Life of Fr. Giussani]*, BUR, Milan 2014, p. 391). I wish that we would treasure what Fr. Giussani told us, in order to be able to really make an impact on the processes in which we are immersed today. However, this is possible only if we don’t get lost along the way.

For the first time, I am able to answer the questions that you ask. At the last School of Community, referring to the parable of the merciful father, you asked, “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?” I am the eldest of two sisters, and I always identified with the son who stays home and sees his brother as preferred by the father. Not that I ever lacked anything: private schools, trips abroad... Once I finished college, the desire to have a family and to have my own life became stronger than ever: I wanted to walk independently, without bothering God for anything. I thought that all of this was legitimate. I met the man who would become my husband, I asked for my part of the inheritance, and I got married. I thought that I would finally have everything, everything that I had dreamed of: a husband, children, a home, a job – in short, what, for me, coincided with the word “happiness.” Obviously, I had taken many things into account: financial difficulties, illnesses, misunderstandings, even the possibility of reciprocal infidelities, but I considered my husband a gift from heaven and I trusted in Providence. I moved to the city, and though I was not “living a dissolute life” – on the contrary, I was trying to build a Christian family – I realized that I was more and more distant from Him, and that the man whom I had married did not really intend

to build our family based on the values that I thought we shared, and that, for me, had Christ as the center – to the point that going to Mass on Sunday became a problem. And so the “famine” arrived – my husband left me when the children were small. I felt lost: the shame, the humiliation of having been rejected, my plans destroyed, the lack of money, the nightmare of the legal procedures, my suffering and the suffering of my children. In that predicament, I also sought the carob pods of the consolation of another man, pods that fortunately – I say this now – no one gave to me! At that point, I realized that I was the prodigal son, and that the only thing that I wanted to do was to go back to the big, strong arms of the Father – a Father who had not left me alone, not even for a minute, and who had the big, strong arms of my parents, of the sister whom I envied and who had never stopped loving me, of my cousins and friends in the Movement. In fact, it was precisely the Movement of Communion and Liberation, which I had met twice before and then happily filed away, that stood before me for the third time. And precisely among my friends in the Movement, I find the people who haven’t given up on me yet, and who, with infinite patience and perseverance, don’t stop witnessing to me that I am loved and that I am not defined by my limits and mistakes. Now, at age 42, I can say that I am happy. Yes, happy, because I am full of the joy that only the encounter with Him can give. I needed the journey of my whole life to discover the grace of having a Father, and my freedom had to go through the experience of being abandoned in order to discover the truth about myself. However, I am grateful for this path, and grateful to Fr. Giussani for the precious gift of the Memores Domini, a drop that flowed from the “broken bark” of his charism, and for whose vocations I pray incessantly.

Thank you. A freedom that wants to leave home, and a home that is waiting for it. How did Fr. Giussani accompany and challenge this way of thinking of freedom – so widespread in our times, in the processes that we mentioned earlier – as an “escape from”? Davide had an idea, and will give us an example of what Fr. Giussani used to do.

Davide Proserpi. *What provoked me in the way in which Fr. Carrón re-proposed the parable of the prodigal son at the Beginning Day was his focus on the experience that I believe we all have, that is, his judgment with regard to modern man, and thus with regard to us. This also seems to be the theme of the witness that we just heard, and which immediately made me think of our original move, because the human journey of the prodigal son does not become concrete in the recognition of his mistakes, in front of which – thank God – there is someone who forgives us; but, first and foremost, it is a claim to independence. In fact, we tend to affirm ourselves, our freedom, as independence from the real, historical, experienceable relationship that generates us now. As if, in order to affirm myself, to be able to fulfill my humanity completely, I had to somehow detach myself, sever this bond. I think that in us, too – even after many years of experience in the Movement – this possible dynamic surfaces, for which I affirm myself according to what I feel, what I think, what I have understood, as an alternative to the true, concrete, real good of our life that is the foundation of the real “I”: the Father’s embrace. What is moving in this parable – precisely as we think of our own lives – is the hope that is born from the fact that this embrace pursues us, that is, that the constant possibility of returning, of recognizing Him again, doesn’t disappear. As I was thinking this during School of Community with my friends, it occurred to me to propose a piece from Beethoven’s Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, precisely because I remembered that Fr. Giussani had given an interpretation of it – according to his extraordinary musical sensibility – that documents the heart of the matter.*

(Playing of the first movement – I. Allegro ma non troppo – of the Concerto in D Major for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 61, by Ludwig van Beethoven, CD no. 6, Spirto Gentil).

I will now read what Fr. Giussani says about this concerto, which was published in the Spirto Gentil series: “The concretely ultimate theme of human existence can be summarized as such: man is born from, he receives everything from. It is striking that nothing of what pertains to our ‘I’ is ours. And yet, man’s most serious temptation is that of thinking that he is autonomous. This is so serious that it coincides with the essence of original sin. Beethoven’s Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, which I have listened to for almost 50 years – ever since I started to teach religion at the Berchet High School in Milan – has become for me the symbol of this supreme, obstinate, constant temptation of man to be his own master, the lord of himself, the measure of himself, despite the evidence of things. Ever since the devil told the woman, ‘It is not true that if you eat this fruit you will die; on the contrary, if you eat it, then you will become free, an adult, you will be like God, you will know good and evil,” ever since then, man’s efforts to become autonomous as culture and as dynamic of love have only multiplied. But let’s return to the Beethoven of almost 50 years ago. You could have seen a priest on the streets of Milan, going around with an enormous gramophone. If someone had asked him, ‘Where are you going?’ he would have answered, ‘I am going to school.’ ‘You take a gramophone to school?’ ‘Well, the school won’t give me one, and so I bring my own.’ One of the first things that I had the students listen to was precisely the Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, with that fundamental theme that runs through the whole piece: the life of man, of society, is represented by the melody of the orchestra, from which the violin runs away three times in order to affirm itself – and by which, three times, it is caught, until it rests peacefully, as if to say, ‘Finally!’ In order to affirm itself, the violin – the individual – always has the temptation of running away in a fleeting burst, and precisely in that attempt, the instrument gives the best of itself. Therefore, the most captivating motifs of the concerto are those of the violin, of the individual who attempts to affirm himself above everyone else. However, the violin cannot last for long in this burst, and thank God that the orchestra – the reality of the community – is there to take him back into its fold. I will always remember the emotion that ran through the class the first time that I had them listen to this piece by Beethoven: the violin was conveying such a yearning that it really made us bow down. That yearning was so perceptible in all of its power that a young woman who was sitting at the second desk near the window facing the courtyard started to sob. The class didn’t laugh. I said only that the place where we find peace is where all of our irrational, or in any case incomplete, impulses are made whole: in the community. In fact, what allows the violin to make those three abovementioned bursts, solitary and full of genius, the three most pacifying moments of the concerto? The support of the community, of the orchestra, to which it can return at any moment, which takes it back, pursues it and takes it back, each time that it runs away. The violin is the man who hopes in his short-lived strength – always conceived as isolated – more than in the common attempt dictated by a shared origin and destiny. No matter how one conceives of it, the autonomy of the individual cannot be right, precisely because, as such, it does not have a true origin in destiny, and therefore it cannot create history. It can cause a temporary emotion, but, right after having broken the surface of the water, it cannot do anything, it cannot have a goal. The yearning that the main theme of the Concerto for Violin and Orchestra inspires – which provoked the sudden sob in that young woman – is the symbol of man’s waiting for God” (“La dimora dell’io” [“The Abode of the ‘I’”] in Spirto Gentil. Un invito all’ascolto della grande musica guidati da Luigi Giussani [An invitation to listen to great music guided by Luigi Giussani], S. Chierici and S. Gianpaolo, editors, BUR, Milan 2011, pp. 135-137).

Another challenge that constantly provokes each of us, in our family or in the education of young people, is how to accompany the processes of our children or our students.

At the last School of Community, a young man told us about his accident and how, in an objectively tragic situation, he immediately told his friends that he didn't want to be consoled, but rather helped to stay in front of the Mystery. This totally blew me away, and caused me to revisit, with a new gaze, a situation that I had lived that very morning. In fact, it made me see it for the first time. After someone else spoke last time, you said that God had given her back her thirst for Him "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 the contrary, precisely... That morning, in fact, I had gone to the doctor with my daughter. She had been in an accident, which fortunately had only resulted in two wounds. On that Wednesday morning, the doctor was supposed to take out the stitches. However, noticing that the wounds were not yet healed, he decided not to do it. I knew that my daughter was very eager to "get back to normal life," to erase a bad memory and a big scare, and I sensed her disappointment. Back in the car, I noticed out of the corner of my eye that she was crying. I tried to tell her what every mother, caring and sorry for her daughter's suffering, generally says: "You'll see – if the doctor didn't take out the stitches, it's because by waiting you will be as beautiful as before. Be patient. Considering what could have happened to you, you have already been lucky." And so on and so forth... In other words, I tried to console her. However, in listening to that young man, I realized that my judgment was totally wrong. I had offered her a consolation without opening the way to the Consoler! Therefore, I told myself, "Who are you to close this crack through which the Mystery is speaking to your daughter? How do you know that those scars aren't the way in which the Lord is telling your daughter, 'Leave me a little more room; let me come in, so that you may remember that I am the One who is making you'?" So I wrote her a text message: "Mom said something stupid. Can we have breakfast together tomorrow morning?" Breakfast was simple, but extremely intense. I told her what had happened to me in listening to you, and I said, "See, it's not enough to thank Our Lady that the accident ended up all right. We were missing the best part. Cherish these scars; they are His caress, asking you to let Him come into your heart again." I don't know what this will bring to my daughter. I definitely saw her start again with a new cheerfulness and certainty, the cheerfulness and certainty of one who knows that she was unexpectedly preferred. I know that this is changing me, as well. How many scars have I hurried to close, without loving them! Without accepting that they were the way in which He was asking me to love and cherish Him. I am beginning again from this. Not from a fake consolation, but from the true Consoler.

Another thing that happened to me was the collection for the Food Bank. Among the many students who got involved at the supermarket with us teachers, three in particular stood out for their zeal and gladness. They are the ones who sit in the first row, not because they are the most studious, but because they are the liveliest, and are therefore obliged by their teachers to stay close to the teacher's desk. Something had happened with one of them that made me understand how I am not called to do the "right" thing, but the true thing. Since I thought that he had copied during a test that I had given in class, I decided to give him an oral exam. It didn't go well, and I thought that I had done justice to what happened. I was going to give him the mark that he deserved, showing

that I was right in not trusting him. However, as I was about to give him a D, I don't know why, but I stopped and looked at him. His head was lowered, caught between anger and uneasiness. "What's wrong? In the end, it's only a D! What's the problem?" "I'm angry, because if I get a D, I can't play soccer anymore. And my dad will be upset." So I told myself that perhaps this kid doesn't like my subject yet, but he loves something: he loves soccer and he loves his dad. Therefore, I decided not to do immediately and simply what, from a professional point of view, would have been asked of me, but to do what I perceived to be most true, for myself and for him. Because who am I not to look at him in the way in which I would like to be – and in fact am – always looked at? So, amid the bewilderment and disbelief of the first row, I told him, "Let's wait a moment. I will quiz you again next week." The next week – needless to say – it was a triumph. He had studied with an exaggerated, commendable commitment. And, day by day, so did all of those sitting in the first row who had witnessed this fact. Doing the true thing and not just the "right" thing freed me, him, and all of his fellow students – as well as his mother, who, when she came for the parent-teacher conference, told me with tears in her eyes, "I didn't believe that one could love like this!" Ultimately, something like this must have happened to the prodigal son, too. He already knew the right thing. He had to leave home in order to reacquire it as true!

I think that Pope Francis is referring precisely to situations like this when, in the speech to the Movements, he states that we find ourselves in front of a wounded humanity, and this is part of the processes that we were talking about. As we can see, today's man has serious problems with making his own choices. Often, our temptation is to substitute ourselves for people's freedom, because they delegate their life decisions to others. Pope Francis stresses that we need to resist this temptation "of usurping individual freedom, of directing them without allowing for their growth in genuine maturity" (*Address to the Third World Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities*, November 22, 2014, 2). In this sense, we, too, have to change. What do we need to learn? Resisting this temptation doesn't mean that we then have to withdraw from reality. On the contrary, this resisting to which Pope Francis invites us is not in order to withdraw, but to learn what the most adequate way to respond to the wound of the person in front of us might be. I will reread the Pope's sentence. "We need to resist this temptation of usurping individual freedom, of directing them without allowing for their growth in genuine maturity." That student only needed a week to start to change.

As I was thinking about these things, I was struck by a text by Péguy that I am going to read to you: "Ask a father if his best moment / Is not when his sons begin to love him like men, / Him as a man, / Freely, / Gratuitously, / Ask a father whose children are growing up. // Ask a father if there is not a chosen time above all / And if it is not / Precisely when submission ceases and when his sons become men / Love him (treat him) so to speak from knowledge, / As man to man, / Freely, / Gratuitously. Esteem him thus. / Ask a father if he does not know that nothing is equal / To the glance of a man meeting the glance of a man. // Well, I am their father, God says, and I know man's condition. / [...] All the slavish submissions in the world are not worth one frank look from a free man. / Or rather all the slavish submissions in the world repel me and I would give everything / For one frank look from a free man, / [...]. To that liberty, to that gratuitousness I have sacrificed everything, God says, / To that taste I have for being loved by free men, / Freely, / Gratuitously, / By real men, virile, adult, firm, / Noble, tender but with a firm tenderness. / To obtain that liberty, that gratuitousness I have sacrificed everything, / To create that liberty, that

gratuitousness, / To set going that liberty, that gratuitousness. // To teach him liberty” (*The Mystery of the Holy Innocents and Other Poems*, Harvill Press, London 1956, pp. 119-121).

In this process, there is much to learn in order to be able to love like this. At work, too, there are processes in which we need to learn constantly.

After the questions that you asked us at the last School of Community, I realized that the journey that you are helping us to make is particularly useful for me at work. My work consists in helping senior managers to be more aware of themselves, in an adult way, so that they are able to guide their companies in their complexity. In order to do this job, we have to do a lot of work on ourselves, not only by taking formation classes at the international level, in big business schools, but also by being very disciplined with ourselves, being truly able to listen, respect, and understand ourselves, and therefore others. In recent months, I asked a doctor who is a psychiatrist, a psychologist, and a neuroscientist to work with us one afternoon a month, so that we can discuss with her and thus continue to improve our approach. And precisely this psychiatrist – a secular, agnostic woman – spoke to us at the last meeting (she brought it up!) about the parable of the prodigal son, saying that the only way to gain freedom is to live like the prodigal son. She also spoke of our need for the father – which causes us to discover our identity – of our need for the meaning of reality, and therefore of the responsibility that each of us has at work, and especially in directing a company. We are talking about companies with thousands of employees around the world. To summarize, the journey that you are having us make is exactly the same one that guides my work daily. And I will be honest: only if I become an adult, responsible, aware – in short, unified – can I work and encounter others. Otherwise, as you say, I become just part of the problem; in fact, I make it worse.

*With regard to the question that you asked at the last School of Community, “What path did your freedom have to travel in order to discover the truth?” I wanted to recount my experience. A few years ago, I lived a very dramatic event: my husband died suddenly. In that situation of great sorrow, I begged and cried out to the Lord that He help me to bear the pain, because nothing comforted me, and I wasn’t able to find any peace. Christ listened to my plea: I encountered Him in the Movement, which I met precisely on that occasion. Beautiful! For the first time, I discovered an enormous correspondence to the heart, due to the great need for truth that I had, and I lived the preference that Christ had and has for me in awe. It became clear who I am, where I come from, my origin, my true self. I became captivated by and attached to this experience, which I desire to continue to live, and a great need was born in me to recognize Him in my daily life. Here, my freedom is put in action precisely in following the Movement, the place that educates me to live reality, makes me become aware, helps me to know and discover the meaning of life. Nothing can fill the sense of dissatisfaction and emptiness that I often experienced and experience, but now I know that there exists, that there is One who responds to my great needs, who fills and fulfills. This is how the words from the Gospel become concrete: “I am with you always, until the end of the age.” I am grateful for the genius of the method of God, who, in order to meet us, “became flesh.” I think that I lived the experience of the prodigal son, which is recounted in the parable: by “hitting rock bottom,” I came to sense who the Father is for me, and that only He can fill the need for happiness that I have. Recently, I was reading Fr. Giussani’s book *In cammino* [On the Way], and one witness speaks of a Christmas poster that says, “The way of the Lord is as simple as that of John and Andrew [...]. Ultimately, there is no other way...” Fr. Giussani asks, “Why is*

it simple?” Speaker: “Because ‘they started to follow Christ out of curiosity and desire. Ultimately, there is no other way, aside from this curiosity full of desire that is awakened by the presentiment of truth.’” And Giussani reiterates the heart of the matter in a very profound and succinct way: “‘Curiosity full of desire that is awakened by the presentiment of truth.’ If you take away one of these words, you take away life” (In cammino. 1992-1998, BUR, Milan 2014, pp.16-17). I greet you, and I thank the Lord for the gift that He has given to us with your presence, which is a sign of His Presence.

Thank you. Now we will speak of another challenge that we have to face today, that is, the ongoing economic recession, and all of the need that it causes to emerge. A gesture in which most of us recently participated attempts to address the growing process of poverty. Now the head of the Food Bank will summarize the way in which we contributed to this process.

Andrea Giussani. *The great experience that was the most recent Food Collection, with all of the stories that we have been able to see and hear, is definitely the greatest richness of this gesture, much more so than the practical result, which, in any case, was 2% more food than the previous year. In these times, this is an exceptional fact, with respect to both the lingering recession and the other food collections that have sprung up everywhere – which is a good for the spreading of charity, even if they are often poorly organized initiatives that don’t have a promising future. Therefore, as far as we are concerned, the greatest result of the Collection is this: it is a gesture that we have been proposing and doing in exactly the same way for the past 18 years, but that every year is rediscovered and amazes us anew. This year, it was enriched by even more witnesses, not only from people who were physically present – volunteers and donors – but also from people who couldn’t participate because they were home due to sickness, disability, or some other obstacle, and yet joined us by using technological instruments instead of word of mouth, helping with the Collection in some way from home. In the end, this is the question that we asked ourselves: Why today, in this recession, do people still make donations? And, in particular, why do people donate while looking hostile or bored? First and foremost, because poverty is evident, real, close to us – it’s not poetry, it’s not something far away, but it is in our life, we encounter it in our towns, in our neighborhoods. Perhaps the experience of the Food Collection in past years and in recent months has been able to better show this to everyone. Also, because the Food Collection is a simple gesture: very simple, clear, supported by motives that are immediately understandable, neither censored nor reduced. The ten lines of the invitation to the Collection clearly state what we want to do, and are communicated by people who take up the Collection with joy, not as a duty or a shift to get through. We saw them everywhere in Italy, because we were together on the Saturday of the Collection: families, elderly people, children, entire schools, needy people who worked as volunteers, cashiers who ended their shift and started to help as volunteers, inmates out on probation. It was truly a very eclectic Italy. Above all, we had to acknowledge that the collection is “contagious.” Fr. Giussani called it “the common fund of the Italians.” What I saw happening this year gave rise to this thought, which is perhaps a bit statistical: the Collection brings out about 135,000 volunteers, a third of whom (at most) come from the experience of the Movement. This means that all of the others come from other experiences: there are the Alpine Troops, people from other charitable works, Caritas, the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, and sometimes unknown passers-by who stop and say, “I want to help too,” and so are caught on the fly. Why does all of this happen? How is it possible? The answer that I tried to give, and that we at the Foundation*

tried to give, is this: because the method that is lived during the Collection, regardless of the extent to which it is understood, is the one that we are living, and that has been witnessed to us this evening, as well. The method is guaranteed by those who organize the Collection, who pass it on, but afterwards it can be encountered by the people. The Collection is something that is useful to the person who participates in it, an initiative that the person immediately recognizes as a proposal and an aid in understanding and doing. I am talking about many people who perhaps don't know what lies at the origin of the gesture, but who encounter this proposal and live it. In doing this simple gesture, the method is fulfilled – I believe – without reductions, in its entirety, and is immediately perceived as something that involves everyone, that amplifies everyone's ability, not by doing things as one pleases, but by following a modality and a practical application that makes one more capable, more efficient, happier, and therefore it somehow makes me recognize that it is also answering my own need. Certainly, the experience of the Movement is behind the gesture of the Collection; it lies at the origin and in the method, but it is not waved around like a flag. Actually, it is the heart and soul of this gesture. This fact made me become aware of the great educational responsibility that we have toward society, and toward the people whom we accompany as we do the Collection, and whom we then accompany every day, because we have had an encounter, or we say that we have. That is why the responsibility is even greater, and it is an experience of mission precisely because it is guided, because it educates – not because we are better than the others in what we say and in what we do, but because we follow. In this sense, what Prosperi highlighted about a bond tells me that the tens of thousands of people involved in the Collection encounter the possibility of a relationship, become involved, and put themselves in action with even more enthusiasm and happiness.

Thank you, because the gesture of the Collection has this significance, this impact on a circumstance as crucial as the recession that affects so many people. It is a grace to have been able to identify in a gesture an effective possibility to educate in a process of this caliber, such as the one that we are living. We hope to identify other gestures that have the possibility to be as influential as the Food Collection. There are many ways to intervene in these processes, from the personal to the more public, more social level, and when we identify the adequate instruments, we see what a contribution they can represent for all gestures of this kind.

Why the Church?

We will conclude with a brief presentation of the next School of Community text, which we will start in January: *Why the Church?* It is the third volume of Fr. Giussani's trilogy. I think that, from the very beginning, the book responds in a wonderful way to the theme that we have taken on today, that is, the collapse of evidence. Fr. Giussani started the Movement because certain things were no longer perceived by the people whom he was meeting, starting with the young people. More than 60 years ago, he realized that people didn't recognize the evidence of what he had received, and that tradition was no longer able to transmit it. What was his concern? From the very beginning, he introduced a new method: "I am not here," he said during his first hour in class, "so that you can take my ideas as your own, but to teach you a true method that you can use to judge the things that I will tell you. And what I have to tell you is the result of a long experience, of a past that is two thousand years old" (*The Risk of Education*, Crossroad Publishing Company, New York 2001, p. 11). Along the entire itinerary, from the first chapter of *The Religious Sense* and *At the Origin of the Christian Claim* to the end, or now from the first chapter of *Why the Church?* all

of his concern regards how we can recognize what will be addressed in the book: how we can recognize Christ when we speak of the Christian claim, and how we can recognize the Church as the continuation of the presence of Christ in history. It's not enough to repeat a discourse; repetition – though correct – doesn't suffice. If the content is not grasped in all of its density, then the evidence will not be such for us, and therefore we will not grow attached to it – it will not help us to live. For this reason, we will start School of Community in January by trying to identify this method of which Fr. Giussani already makes us aware in the Preface. In fact, without it, we can read and reread the book and make our comments, but we will not be able to grasp the full significance of what the Church is without what Fr. Giussani introduces as the factor that helps us to judge: elementary experience, the heart, the religious sense. Indeed, the only possibility consists in generating a subject that makes man able to recover and recognize the most elementary evidence of life. Without this, School of Community will be reduced to simply making certain comments that have no impact on the processes that we discussed this evening – and in which we find ourselves up to our necks – thus losing the method that Fr. Giussani taught us along the way.

I remind you of the **Christmas Poster**, because the phrases that we have chosen, one by Pope Francis and one by Fr. Giussani, already offer us the starting point for a journey.

The next School of Community will be on Wednesday, January 21st at 9:30pm. We will start to work on the Preface and the first chapter of *Why the Church?*

Papal Audience on March 7, 2015. We want to go to the audience that Pope Francis has granted to the whole Movement on March 7th, open and trusting, as we listen to his words and to the indications that he will give us about the path to follow. The Mass in February for the anniversary of Fr. Giussani's death and the pontifical recognition of the Fraternity of CL will be a privileged moment to prepare ourselves for the encounter in St. Peter's Square. We suggest that you look again at the Pope's address to the World Congress of Movements, which we quoted today. We have also put some meaningful videos of our history on the CL website, which can be watched together. I remind you that the invitation to the audience is extended to everyone, and therefore it is an opportunity to invite our friends. Registration will open on January 15th and close on February 12th.

Book of the Month for January and February 2015. With the beginning of the new School of Community, I thought that it might be helpful to re-propose *La conversione al cristianesimo nei primi secoli* [*Conversion to Christianity in the Early Centuries*] by Bardy. Even if many people are already familiar with it, I think that reading it now has a different meaning, because we are becoming aware of the fact that precisely the processes that we discussed earlier are much closer than we think to the initial moments of Christianity as described by Gustave Bardy. In fact, we are facing a totally pluralistic society, like that of the early centuries. Reading the book with this awareness can make it completely different from how we already know it, because now we have questions of which we may not have been as clearly aware before. For this reason, I think that this is a beautiful opportunity to read or reread it with this new perspective.

Merry Christmas to everyone!

Veni Sancte Spiritus