

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, March 16, 2016**

Reference text: L. Giussani, “The Three Constituent Factors,” in Why the Church?, McGill-Queen’s, 2001, pp. 87-95.

- *My Lord, What a Morning*
- *Lascia che il mondo [Let the World]*

Glory Be

We will start with the second factor of the awareness that the first Christians had of the Church: “The Community Invested by a ‘Strength from on High.’” We have seen how they had “the firm conviction that the reality of the living Christ took hold of their lives, redeeming them, assuming them as its own, and rendering them the Mystery of a united body” (p. 87). Each of us should measure himself against these words: in traveling the path of School of Community, from the first point onward, did the conviction that Christ takes hold of our life and redeems it grow, did it become stronger? What signs do we have of this, and to what extent does the factor of being part of a community awaken a new way of saying “I”? Where have we recognized this? By living in a place like this – the reality of a sociologically identifiable community – we enter into the second great factor: “The Community Invested by a ‘Strength from on High.’” Fr. Giussani speaks of “an exceptional dimension of the awareness those first Christians lived” (p. 87). He doesn’t simply restrict himself to describing the facts, but rather insists on the “firm conviction” and the “lived awareness,” so much so that the first element is “Awareness of a Fact Which Has the Power to Change the Personality” (p. 88). So, how has this awareness grown?

For some time now, it seems to me that you have been insisting a great deal on the verification of faith as a personal experience to which each of us is called. I have always agreed with your insistence, but I have never worked on what you said. I always thought that it was someone else’s problem, not mine – because, after all, I was with the authority, I was thinking like the authority, and I was trying to follow the authority. In short, I was listening to you, I was following you – or so I thought – and I was seeing some sort of results. At the last School of Community, when you asked what keeps us together, what really brought us together, what we are, and what we live, I had the answer. I even agreed with you on the issues related to the Family Day – everything. However, here is the problem. I didn’t understand one thing: I was full of words and reasons, but my experience felt formal. Then, something happened at work that changed me. There were several difficulties, for different reasons, that made me think that the fact of still being there was no longer a given. I understood that there was something wrong in me, because in this situation, the experience of faith was taken over by a strategy. However, this made the previous questions become “my” questions: in the end, who am I, what holds me together, what do I live? Since the last School of Community, these questions have been burning in my heart, and I realize how pitifully I use reason, which ends up being subservient to what suits me, or to how I imagine reality, instead of living it. Then, I talk about experience instead of having it. I cannot deceive myself, because what is at stake is not life in general, but my own life, my destiny, and my happiness. Thus, I would like to ask for your help in understanding yet again what it means to make a serious

verification of faith, what its fundamental factors are. I apologize for the banality of the question, but I am becoming aware of how little I am accustomed to using reason according to its true nature.

Are you ready to start to make this verification? In your opinion – starting from what you said, not from what you didn't say – where can you discover, by catching yourself in action, that you have grown with regard to this first point of the School of Community, that is, in the awareness of a fact that has the power to change you?

A greater knowledge of myself.

A greater knowledge of yourself. Where do you see this?

In the fact that I thought that I was somehow understanding and following, but I really wasn't...

This is simply recognizing that you haven't changed. Instead, Fr. Giussani speaks of the awareness of a fact that has the power to change you. Did you change in some way?

Well, yes.

Where?

I started to work at it.

Do you see? The point is that you are not aware of it. What is the change that you identified with an unparalleled insight?

That the questions have become "my" questions.

That the questions are yours now. Does that seem inconsequential to you?

No, no.

Ultimately, generic questions left you exactly the same as before. However, in belonging to a place, something moved within you – as you said at the beginning – due to my insistence on the verification of faith. Then, a fact at work had the power to make yours...

...the questions.

You no longer got upset because you couldn't make those questions become yours. You couldn't help the fact that, from that moment on, they started to burn within you, changing you. Thus, it is the beginning of something that is changing you, since you are immersed in the Christian community. We haven't reached the end of the path, but the "awareness of a fact which has the power to change the personality." These are just words to us, headings on which we then reflect in an abstract way. No – this is what you recognized. The first factor of the verification of faith is to become aware of this increased self-awareness, but especially of what lies at the origin of this change. This allows you not only to talk about experience, but to have it. It's not just a moralistic effort that you make, because you are already having this experience! The problem is that it doesn't fully become an experience until you are aware of it. Something is happening, but it doesn't reach the level of awareness, and therefore we ask the questions without realizing what is already happening within us. You need to recognize that you have already identified a factor of the verification. You already have the beginning of the answer within the experience that you are having.

Thank you.

"The first Christians were well aware that everything happening in them and among them – the new and exceptional [...], the revolutionary compared with the lives so many others around them were leading [they get angry, they get stuck, they complain, they criticize each other] – was not the fruit of their adherence, of their intelligence, or of their will [to which we reduce verification], but a gift of the Spirit" (p. 89). To us, this seems like too much. The fact that what you witnessed could be a gift of the Spirit doesn't even cross your mind, you don't even mention it in what you

say. Therefore, it cannot generate a personality that is sufficiently aware. Why? Because personality is self-awareness: if it doesn't reach the level of self-awareness, then the personality is not generated.

During these weeks, I have been struck by the descriptive power of the chapters of the School of Community with respect to my life and what is happening. As I reread the part on the Christian community and the first Christians' self-awareness, I inevitably compared it to my life. I was particularly provoked by the section on the "Strength from on High." I realize that there are moments – let's say – in my life in which the relationship with others and with reality is more significant, and so they question me, because they point me toward a mysterious "something." I will give two examples, and then I have a question. In my work (I am a school principal), I meet with people very often: students, parents, teachers – usually because of problems, troubles, things that aren't working. Recently, I had two conversations. Last year, I had met with an 8th-grader who had failed the previous year, whose mother is dead and whose father is in prison. He flunked last year, and this year he is showing the worst of himself. He is sent to my office very often, he gets agitated with some teachers, he is rude. The last time, I wanted to be straight with him, because he didn't want to go back to class or even apologize to his teacher for what he had done. I told him that I sympathized with his anger at the world, I told him that I knew about his mother, I asked him about his father and what he does with him when social services take him for a visit, if he loves him. During this rapid-fire dialogue, in a moment of greater intensity, of something "more" that I found within myself, I told him, "You are not your anger, you are not a mistake, you are not a boy who didn't turn out well. Not even your father's mistakes can define you." I felt his eyes fixed on me. I concluded by telling him to go back to class and apologize, which he did. In the subsequent days – when he came to school – he smiled at me and greeted me, taking off the hood that he always wears over his head. Second conversation. The mother of a student who will be moving on to high school next year came to see me. She is Muslim and wears a veil. She said that she didn't know why she had come to see me, but she told me in tears that the principal of the high school where she had enrolled her son for next year – he has some health issues – had not wanted to listen to her, even over the phone. They simply informed her that there wouldn't be a place for her son in that school. She repeated to me that she didn't know why she had come to tell me about it and – as she said – to be listened to. Then we talked about her son, and in the end, I told her that I would pray for his health. Once again, I saw before me two eyes full of tears and gratitude. In both cases, at the end of the conversation, once I had said good-bye to each of them, I perceived in myself an overabundance of the things that I had said to them, like the sincere recognition of the work of an Other. Immediately afterward, though, as I work, as I do something else, as I read, as I study, the rationalistic doubt arises: is that what really happened? No, I tell myself, it's my temperament. Moreover, though I am a fairly jovial person, cordial, a bit simple-minded to begin with, ever since I became a principal, I have had the experience, like never before, of being moved by the other and feeling sorrow at my inability to help him. I find myself crying with other people. And yet, I continue to explain to myself that it is because of the education that I have received, whose "concepts" have settled into my heart and my reason, and thus I have made them mine. Within myself, I see the ongoing attempt to explain that overabundance that I do and did notice with determinable factors. Therefore, Fr. Carrón, this is the question: how can one be sure that a "strength from on high" is at work within him? Can this sure awareness of the first Christians be ours, too?

What do you say?

I can say what effect I noticed in myself with respect to the two different gazes, the two attitudes.

That's not necessary. Before the gaze arrived... The gaze is a confirmation. What did you say before the gaze arrived?

What did I say?

"Something 'more' that I found within myself."

Yes.

Before everything else! The first thing arose within you. That is the wellspring that struck those people.

I found it within myself.

You found it within yourself. Period! Do you give yourself this "more"? This is crucial, because we often jump to the other person's gaze – which is fine – but we don't realize what the origin of our action is, which precedes the other's response. However, since we are not aware of it, we often depend on the validation of others. Instead, Fr. Giussani always told us that faith is a present experience "confirmed by this experience," because, before any outside validation, you have the confirmation in your own experience, in this "more" that generates the gaze, which then moves the other. This is what we take for granted, what we aren't aware of, and what, instead, defines self-awareness. Otherwise, we are fragile, and if we don't find the external validation...

...we give up.

We give up, with all of the consequences that we well know: complaint, insecurity, fear. First point: we have to recognize that the fact exists. Second point: the fact is so present that it is the origin of that gaze (which is not imposed automatically). So what do you find in the School of Community to answer your question? Why don't these facts, this "more" that you find within yourself, make you certain? "Man now stands before Jesus Christ in the same way today as he did 2,000 years ago." There is no difference, and like then, "no sign will ever be enough to force man's freedom to look at the proposal of Christ in a way that is wide open, like the face of a child, or even with the wary, suspicious eyes of so many adults" (p. 94). That is, your freedom is not spared. But many times, when we ask these questions, we are really waiting for facts that make our freedom unnecessary. Like in Jesus' time: "Give us another sign that spares our freedom." Thank God that they don't exist! You already have everything that you need. The point is that our freedom can be wide open, like a child's, or wary, like that of an adult who – as you well say – lets rationalistic doubt prevail. But we have to look rationalistic doubt in the face. Can this doubt eliminate what happened to me? Can the doubt erase that "more" that I found within myself? Can the doubt erase the fact that you are now standing before me?

No.

The doubt cannot erase it. Then, whether or not we recognize it depends on our freedom. This is our freedom. Without this freedom, your self-awareness doesn't grow, because – as Fr. Giussani says – in the relationship with Christ, nothing is automatic. And yet, we cherish the image of a fact that spares us from engaging our freedom. It's impossible! All of the signs are given to you. You have to decide whether you want to use them, whether you want to take advantage, even of this doubt, in order to ask yourself: is it true or not? Don't let the opportunity pass you by, don't let the doubt go unresolved (because this only causes insecurity to grow).

Thank you.

A few days ago, I was driving to charitable work, which is more or less 20 minutes from the university where I study. At one point, I was stopped by the police for a routine check. The policeman who came to ask for my papers was very angry, really annoyed even by the two seconds that it took me to get out my license. I was missing a document that I was supposed to have, so, very worried, I called my dad to ask him what I should do. In the meantime, the policeman had walked away, so I got out of the car and went over to him, trying to explain the situation. He said, "Fine, miss. Don't waste my time, let's fill out this form." So he proceeded to ask me questions about where I live, etc. But, at a certain point, after asking me for my address and social security number, he said, "Excuse me, but I have to ask you a question." "Go ahead." "Are you religious?" I was surprised by his question, but I answered, "Yes." "Which religion? Catholic?" "Yes, I'm Catholic." He turned to his partner and said, "I told you so. This girl – do you see? – has a really beautiful face, clean, very truthful. You can tell that she's religious." Shocked by this, I continued to answer the questions about my license plate, etc. At one point, I turned toward my fellow student, who was in the car with me, and said, "Let the others in our charitable work group know that we're going to be late." The policeman stopped and said, "Where are you going?" "We are friends from college and we are going to do some volunteer work, called charitable work. We help middle and high school kids." He was really surprised, and commented, "It's incredible that things like this still exist in today's world, that young people still do this kind of thing." The other policeman looked at me and added, "In any case, you shouldn't stop doing these activities, because it's clear that only things this beautiful can give you a face like that." At that point, he apologized for making me late. At first, he had been angry because I was wasting his time, and now he was apologizing because he was making me late for charitable work! Then he gave me back all of my papers. I got back into the car, and I tried to tell the other girl what had happened, how the two policemen had changed. We had just gotten back on the beltway when we saw the same police car that had stopped us pull up next to us. I commented smartly, "Too bad for the people behind us, now they will pull them over." Instead, they stopped me again. I pulled over and thought, "Oh no, I was wrong! What on earth did I do?" The policeman came running over as the cars were zooming by – I was concerned – and told me, "Miss, give me that paper for a moment. I have to add some information." I answered, "Thank you!" "Good luck, good luck with everything. It was a pleasure." I got back into the car. The freshman who was next to me was shocked. "In seven minutes!" She kept repeating, "Seven minutes!" That is, in seven minutes, that policeman had become another person. This fact was crucial for me to grow in the self-awareness that we were discussing just now, in the sense that, in front of the policeman's amazement and his change, I really...

It confirms that he had really become aware of the change!

This really made me look at myself as if I had some strange clothes on: what am I wearing? What am I wearing, so that, in seven minutes, a stranger gets to the point of not only noticing a difference (also with respect to what the previous speakers said), but of even identifying its origin in being Catholic? He understood right away, he wasn't dumb. As you often tell us, the others understand immediately that the origin is not my ability, or my temperament, but the fact that I am "religious." With respect to the question that you often ask us about the nature of witness, for me it was clear that it's not an effort, but rather making room for that burning spot that is present in my life, that changes and has changed me deep down – so much so that, upon meeting me, another person perceives it as corresponding, and he changes in turn.

What do we have that can change another person in seven minutes, to the point of awakening a question about its origin in him? As we have been saying lately, it is often the others who tell us that what we have is different, who allow us to verify what the School of Community says, who demonstrate it to us. It's as if they said to us: do you realize that this is not because of you, but because of what you have? "Are you religious?" That policeman had that intuition because what he saw cannot be explained in a rationalistic way. It's striking! Even someone who is angry can witness to us a gaze that is open, with the simplicity of a child, which we may be lacking. This is what witnesses even more strongly to what we read in the School of Community, further on, about the struggle. "We cannot even begin to imagine how radical the combat was – the struggle, the totally different phenomenon that Jesus Christ [not us, be careful!] had to bring about in terms of mentality, sensibility, in established ways of life – when he began to make his presence felt in the world [and to impose Himself]. Christ's history among us chose to impose itself with an extraordinary capacity, through exceptional facts which, in the Gospel, are called miracles" (p. 93). Can this be explained with factors that can be rationalistically controlled?

I am a doctor, and I will tell you what happened to me at work recently. A very premature infant in very serious condition was transferred to our department. From the moment his parents entered our ward, they declared themselves to be against aggressive treatment. They wanted to bring home a fully healthy baby, and they especially didn't want to give their first child a younger brother with serious problems. The baby got through the acute phase without needing extraordinary measures, but every day, the insistent question of the mother was whether the child was going to be normal, whether we had grounds for thinking the opposite. One day, during an exam, it was discovered that he was actually developing some brain damage that wasn't yet clearly quantifiable. The conversation with the parents was very difficult, and the more I looked at the mother, the more I felt a sense of dismay, of impatience and shock, rising up within me. I couldn't understand how a mother with such a tiny son in her arms could be so cynical and insensitive, as if everything depended on her and her son's health conditions. The fact that I was scandalized was creating a wall between the two of us – as if I were better than her, though I am also enslaved by my projects with regard to my husband and children... In the subsequent days, I was so angry that I tried to avoid her, or to avoid going into that room, perhaps also out of the fear of having to face that suffering. Every time that I talked about this situation with my colleagues, I was profoundly distressed. Then we had School of Community, and you told us, "I know very well that we were chosen by God,' but does this prevail in our way of living? As you can see, having the text of School of Community, where the whole truth about the Church is presented through Fr. Giussani's healthy doctrine, is not enough for this self-awareness to prevail." In that moment, I understood that the problem was precisely my self-awareness. I know that I have been chosen by God, that I am in CL, in the companionship of the Church – and yet, I am unable to look at this woman, I am unable to speak her language. This question that was arising in me led me to work harder on the School of Community. At a certain point, Fr. Giussani says that the gift of the Spirit has to be asked for, begged for. Right there, my whole heart exploded, all of my need that He show Himself in that face, that that circumstance become meaningful for me. Thus, the next day, I was able to enter that room, and as soon as I asked, "How are you doing today, ma'am?" a very long conversation ensued that moved me multiple times. What emerged was not her cynicism, but all of her insuppressible desire to be a mother, along with the great terror that her life and the life of her first son could be ruined by this baby's illness. For the first time, I started to identify with her,

and I told her how, the more I see my children grow, the more I realize that they are not like I had imagined them – far from it – and the more I am unable to love them properly. She answered that her problem wasn't whether her son became a doctor or a street sweeper, but that he could be free to choose what he wanted to be instead of being influenced by his illness. I said that happiness for a child is first of all to feel loved, and to see in his parents the certainty that life is always worth living. Here we got to the bottom of the issue, because she answered that the problem is precisely that she doesn't have this certainty, and thus she is terrified of the future. The only thing that I could tell her was that it is impossible for anyone to reach this certainty on his own, and that we need to be sustained on this journey. So I proposed that she meet with families and parents who had faced, or were facing, life with such a special child, in order to realize that it is possible to be happy. As I was talking, I had in mind the faces of my friends who are living this experience. That mother was thrilled with my proposal. So I told her that I would also stay close by her on this journey, as much as I could. I don't know how this story will pan out, whether she will ever come to accept her son, or whether the baby will be healthy or not. But what moved me was leaving there with my heart full of love for her and for him. I was glad, free of the anguish of having to cut out that part of reality that I was unable to face, and aware that living my job like this makes me enjoy it a hundred thousand times more. Above all, that mother and her baby (who will stay in our ward for quite some time) are the constant provocation to ask myself whether and why life is worth living, to ask the Holy Spirit for help in not falling prey to cynicism, not hiding or avoiding what makes me suffer, because my life is full of projects that don't work out, and my job constantly forces me to face the question about life's meaning. With regard to this, I really do need to be educated and sustained, so thank you!

Help us to identify the signs of this change in your witness, through your belonging to the Church. We need to grasp them, otherwise we continue to speak generically.

I experienced a possibility of living my reality...

Only a possibility?

I could enjoy it. I was happy.

You won't get off that easily. Tell me where you perceived this happiness. Otherwise, the School of Community becomes abstract. The first sign, the beginning of the miracle, is that one asks for and invokes this gift of the Spirit. This was the first thing that you did. It seems like nothing, but instead, it offers Christ present the possibility to open you up within a reality in which you initially felt blocked, and which your natural reaction would have caused you to censor. The surprise is that, at a certain point, by participating in a place like the Church, one can experience this change. The first sign: asking. And the second?

The movement of my freedom.

In fact, you changed so much that you went into the room, and not as the result of an effort ("How are you doing today, ma'am?"). Third: identifying with the other, with that mom. Our possibility to make a contribution to the world, to encounter the wounded of the world – just as we, too, are wounded – depends on the verification of what we live. If we don't make the journey of verification, then we will not be able to recognize that woman's need, to the point of discovering that the problem was a very human predicament: she wasn't certain, and therefore she was fearful. That is why you were scandalized. Without this present event, which opens up our gaze again, we identify everything in the wrong way, even – pay attention! – what scandalizes us, because we attribute to the other something that is actually related only to our incapacity to see all of the factors, and which, instead, the power of the Spirit makes possible. It leaves us speechless! That

is why the journey that we are invited to make is so crucial – first and foremost, for yourself (because otherwise you live divided: on the one hand, you participate in the life of the Movement, and on the other, you are stuck at work), and then for the others. The verification of faith has this cultural and historic scope, this kind of impact on the way we live reality.

I will start from your article, “Una presenza originale” [“An Original Presence”], which was published in the latest Tracce. The content is clearly striking. Many of us were amazed by the depth and clarity of judgment. What strikes me the most, though, is the journey that you made, the way in which you looked at the circumstance that the Movement is living right now. For me, what was happening was chaos, but for you, it was an opportunity. As you repeated to us, “Everything that the Mystery doesn’t spare us is for our maturation” (“Una presenza originale,” Tracce, no. 3/2016, p. II). I repeat this phrase, but you live it. Therefore, you have started a journey that none of us – at least, not me – has begun yet, this work, this striking path. You delved into the issue even when, in the end, you didn’t have to (now that the political controversy over civil unions has passed). On the contrary, you wanted to look at it, to face it as no one else had, by asking yourself what this was asking of you and of us. You went to see what Fr. Giussani said in a similar situation, you wanted to verify how pertinent it was to the circumstance that we are living, to the point of giving a judgment. You went to see what the history of the Church teaches us, you compared the situation to the Gospel, and so on. Who among us did this? I think that this is the difference. This is the verification of faith. I believe that this is extremely important for the personal growth of each one of us, because there will always be circumstances that somehow challenge us – in our work, in relationships, in life – and if we don’t understand that the newness that faith introduces is the way to face all of those things, then we are lost. What happened is even more educational for those who think that they are “on your side.” You often say that the most dangerous people are the so-called “followers of Carrón,” because we could be content with the fact that you did the work without starting to do it ourselves. Where do we differ from you? Do you do it because you are the boss? No. I think that you do it because of faith, because you consider the circumstance to be an opportunity for you. If we don’t come to identify with you, then it will really be a crime – at least, this is what I discover in myself – because we will not grow as people of faith, we will not become adults in the faith, and we will content ourselves with the fact that you do this work. Also, with respect to this text: you made a fundamental statement, which we can wave like a flag in front of the others. But what work did I do? Where are we? How am I growing in faith? If we limited ourselves to doing this, then we would lose the entire contribution that first Fr. Giussani, and now you, are giving to us. From the moment in which I became aware of this, I have been asking the Holy Spirit every day to give me the ability to identify myself with it to this extent. It is what I desire most at this moment. I am grateful that we are doing School of Community on a “Strength from on High,” because your position, and the contribution that emerged from it, made this point very clear to me. I find it impossible to read your text without thinking of the words of the School of Community: “A prophet is one who announces the significance of the world and the value of life. The power of prophecy is the power to know what is real. Prophecy is not of man. It comes from on high” (p. 92). I hope that God will grant me this grace, at least during this Lent.

Thank you, because I think that you described well what is at stake for all of us in this verification. I make this verification for myself. I do it because I can no longer refrain from doing it. I could have avoided it, as you said. It would have been easier to give the team order, “Everyone to Rome!” Instead, I wanted to challenge each of you to make your own verification. I knew what I was going

up against. However, I am not interested in being liked by others, or by myself. I am interested in verifying personally. I took a risk in order to verify whether this article responds to the challenges that we are facing. It is an attempt, without any claim of being the right thing. That is why I invited everyone to verify it. The text in *Tracce* is the outcome of this – not in order to give you the doctrine to repeat, but to invite each of you to verify it for your own benefit. Otherwise, we will not be able to be in the world with a face, with reasons, with a certainty, as we have heard this evening. The sign that Christ is present now, and not just a remembrance of the past, is precisely the fact that I can verify the advantage of faith in the present, the pertinence of faith to the needs that I have to face in my life. If I don't perceive it like this, then I will content myself with repeating what I "already know" – but in the end, I will be defeated. Instead, here we have all of the means to make a verification. Therefore, I will conclude by referring you to an article in *Tracce* about our friend Francesco Boin, who is a physician in San Francisco. The world in which he lives will be increasingly our own, with very difficult challenges to face (he always has to be careful about what he says, because any interference with the other person's conscience can cause him problems at work). And yet, Francesco says, "This sharing changes everything, even the medical aspects of their condition. The first way I can help them is for me, for myself, to respond to the wound that reality inflicts on me." Only if one makes his own verification, can he live with dignity in a world like ours. "The true cultural battle here is to rebuild, starting from a fullness of life, lived [there as well as here, as you can see]. So my task is to yield to the attraction that reality generates in my days, and to the discovery of how Jesus responds to my need. [...] Being a witness is possible when they see in me what they are looking for." It is the certainty about which we spoke this evening. A colleague said to him, "I really have to ask you something. You have to help me understand. You don't have a woman in your life, you don't have a man, but you have a point of stability in your life. It's obvious." And he asked him, "What's behind it all?" It cannot help but raise the question about the origin, and it cannot help but be the occasion to explain the reason, because the most complicated and difficult thing is to cause the question to emerge. "Who is this man?" Now, 2,000 years later: "What's behind it all?" "Are you religious?" Francesco answered, "I'm Catholic, and for me the experience of faith was the encounter with a Presence so alive and so attractive that I gave my life to Him. My point of stability [he is not married, he doesn't have emotional props] is this relationship" – the relationship that he lives with Christ. So the other person told him, "Thank you. I understand that it's something that's missing for me" ("What's Behind It All?" by Alessandra Stoppa, *Tracce*, no. 3/2016, pp. 19-23). This is what our being in the world is about. The point is whether this section of the School of Community has made us even more aware of this. What is the sign? If, when I wake up in the morning, His presence prevails – not the fact of not being up to the task, because it's a given that I'm not. Were we amazed once more by His presence at work among us, not as a fact of the past, not as a devout remembrance, but as something so present that it fills us, that our whole life is filled by His presence? If it's not like this, then all of the facts that we recount to each other are unable to generate a greater awareness in us. Then, those who suspect that it is impossible for us to have the same awareness as the first Christians would be right. It's not that we don't have facts in front of us, but the awareness of what all of these facts demonstrate is lacking. That is why the Mystery sometimes has to give us other people who ask us the question about our origin, so that we can reach this awareness.

The next School of Community will be on May 25th at 9:00pm. (We will skip the month of April because we will have the *Fraternity Spiritual Exercises*.) We will go over the last part of “The Three Constituent Factors,” pp. 95-111. This will be our work during April, and then we will start working on the Introduction of the *Exercises* as soon as it is available, guided by this question: How does the Movement change our conception of the Church, that is, the way in which we live it? How does reading the last point of this chapter, “A New Type of Life,” change our conception of communion, of the relationship between ontology and ethics, between community and authority? All of the factors present there ask us for a change in awareness. As we can see, the School of Community becomes fruitful if we do the daily work of making a comparison with some of the sentences that we read, in order to become aware of how it judges our day. As our friend told us, a phrase was enough to introduce a different gaze into how she was living her work. This is enough. If the School of Community is not something that accompanies us as the hypothesis with which we enter into reality, then it is reduced to our comments. And then what good is it? It will never become interesting like that. It becomes interesting when one sees that it offers him the suggestion of a way to stay in reality that changes him. That is why it is a companionship for our life. It is this constant comparison that broadens our horizon and causes what Fr. Giussani proposes to become a mentality, which is then confirmed in experience by the facts that happen.

Page One of the March issue of Tracce contains my contribution at the Assembly of Italian Leaders. I expanded upon some aspects that are in the book *La bellezza disarmata [Unarmed Beauty]*, in order to help us to judge the current challenges. As I said, it is an attempt that I offer as a sign of the work that our friend mentioned, a sign of friendship. I hope that it is useful; if not, you can throw it away. I invite you to read it and to distribute it to all of our friends, in order to help us to make this comparison.

Easter Poster. This is a tool that we propose every year, along with the Christmas Poster, in order to present everyone with a theme that is particularly important to us. In a year like this one, I wonder: what does the Pope want us to learn in this Year of Mercy? If one doesn’t ask himself this question, it is because he thinks, “I already know what Mercy is.” But maybe we don’t know it yet. We must prepare for the *Exercises* with this question: what does the Pope perceive, which caused him to proclaim the Year of Mercy?

I will reread the text of the Easter Poster:

“The fragility of our era is this, too: we don’t believe that there is a chance for redemption; for a hand to raise you up; for an embrace to save you, forgive you, pick you up, flood you with infinite, patient, indulgent love; to put you back on your feet. When you feel his merciful embrace, when you let yourself be embraced, when you are moved – that’s when life can change, because that’s when we try to respond to the immense and unexpected gift of grace, a gift that is so overabundant it may even seem ‘unfair’ in our eyes” (Pope Francis).

“When the centurion saw Jesus, when the Samaritan woman felt herself looked at and described in detail, when the woman taken in adultery heard him say, ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go, and do not sin anymore,’ when John and Andrew saw that face look on them intently and speak to them, they were immersed in his presence. To be immersed in the presence of Christ who gives us his justice, to look at him: this is the conversion that fundamentally changes us. In other words, it leaves us forgiven. It is enough to look at him again, to think of him again, and we are forgiven” (Luigi Giussani).

Fraternity Spiritual Exercises. Registration will open on the Fraternity website on Friday, March 18th and will close on April 5th. The gesture of the *Exercises*, in addition to the lessons and the assembly, is also made up of silence, song, prayer, and attention to the other. Let's be open to living it in its totality, keeping in mind the question that I gave you, so that it can have an impact on our life. Therefore, remember to participate in the entire gesture as an expression of this begging that we need.

May the upcoming Holy Week find us full of the desire to identify with the humanity of Jesus, who offered Himself gratuitously in sacrifice for us, trusting only in His relationship with the Father. This is the greatest gift of the mercy that God, through His Son, gives to each of us.

Veni Sancte Spiritus

Happy Easter to everyone!