

**Notes from the School of Community Assembly
with Davide Prospero and H.E. Monsignor Filippo Santoro
in video conference from Milan, 8th June, 2022**

Text: L. Giussani, To Give One's Life for the Work of Another, McGill's-Queens, Montreal 2022, pp. 3-41.

Filippo Santoro

Before we begin, let us say a prayer, a Hail Mary, and sing a hymn to Our Lady and pray for the martyrs of Nigeria: 21 martyrs (including children), plus another 200 wounded in Owo Cathedral during the Pentecost Mass. They are martyrs *in odium fidei* (by hatred of the faith), because they are Christians; it is a fact underestimated by the international press, but for us it is a testimony of what it means to live the faith in a total sense, recognizing Christ as the life of life.

*Hail Mary
Veni, Sancte Spiritus*

And now let's sing *Nossa Senhora, mãe de Jesus* as peace is indeed a gift and a miracle.

- *Nossa Senhora, mãe de Jesus*

Davide Prospero

Good evening. This evening we are meeting again after a few months in which, among other things, we have also experienced the Fraternity Exercises, which—as we know—have been very useful for our journey during this time, so much so that in many of the questions that have come in there is also a documented reflection on the steps that have been indicated and signaled by this gesture. The work of School of Community has produced many questions that we have collected; this evening we will address some that are exemplificative and that touch key points of the part of the School of Community text that we have been working on. What emerges from the contributions is the fruit of this work in the communities and on a personal level, also through following Fr. Filippo's invitation (more than an invitation, it was his personal testimony!) to devote ten minutes a day to the School of Community. It has really been taken seriously in many and I think it has produced, is beginning to produce, its fruits where it has been done faithfully. Tonight we will start to dig into some of the questions that have emerged.

There is a first question (which is like a premise to all the others), which is about the fact that we have found ourselves in several cases a little bit disoriented, because the School of Community text has raised questions surrounding its understanding, not just from a lexical standpoint, but from the point of view of the content of experience behind the words that Fr. Giussani has communicated to us in this text. This is the first time facing this text after so many years, both for those who had not experienced the 1997 Fraternity Exercises and those who had participated at them (I think most have forgotten). We came up against an unforeseen situation, which brought out in a more dramatic way the question, "How is it possible to do School of Community without reducing it to a theory or our own interpretation?" So I ask Fr. Filippo if he can already begin by answering this question, which has to do with a broader issue of method.

Santoro

Good evening to all of you here and to all those who are following us from various parts of the world. There were about 80 to 90 questions, so it was hard to be able to summarize; however, we have identified the key points.

This issue about the difficulty of the text is a fundamental question, and it makes us understand precisely that School of Community is actually a school, and in a school you don't go over the same things repeatedly, there are times where you go deeper into the content. This is precisely what Fr. Giussani wanted to do: instead of expressing himself in a spontaneous manner, as he had always done, he wanted to propose a meditative, reflective, dense text which requires pondering, and therefore he is inviting us to carry out a personal work. At school you don't always go over the same things, at school there is always something new to discover, and this demands a work on a personal and community level. This School of Community has required a real work.

There are testimonies that tell us how this approach to the work was experienced: it is as if a step forward towards the level of knowledge and affection was taken. Fr. Giussani's text broadens knowledge and introduces us to an experience and to know things through experience, not to repeat things theoretically; and then also to live a dynamic of affection, of friendship, of experiencing what the text said. This was the case for me too, after trying to present it in the most concise and simple way possible (trying to be simple and concise was definitely no picnic!). That's just how it is: when you become one with the content knowledge and fondness grow.

I wanted to start precisely from three testimonies that recount this journey.

"I would like to recount what the journey of this year's School of Community has been for me [and particularly the last Schools of Community]. In the beginning, when the new book arrived, we were all excited about the title, *To Give One's Life for the Work of Another*. We thought, 'We're finally going to read about what we need to do to spend our lives building God's work [what we need to do!].' The impact with the content was very destabilizing. We were suddenly faced with a difficult text that forced us to work hard. I remember Schools of Community where we read paragraph by paragraph [which in itself is a diligent task!] trying to understand and make what Fr. Giussani was telling us our own. We found ourselves far removed (in terms of experience) from what we already thought we possessed. Of course, we know that God is all in all and Christ is all and in all, but we still felt a gap, almost a distance from what the School of Community was saying. We found ourselves as if starting over again trying to make our own a judgment that we thought we already possessed [*já sei* in Brazilian: I already know, but instead it is like undertaking a journey again]. What was most amazing about this work was that despite our total inability to understand and translate into experience what we were reading, a lot of new young families attached themselves to that group. At some point it became evident that that place [the work of School of Community and its community] was more than the sum of the factors that each of us could bring, mysteriously an attraction that we were clearly not producing was recognized."

So the work produced first and foremost a gathering, a communal sense of commitment, of personal responsibility, because the School of Community is first and foremost a personal responsibility. Right now the most evident aspect is that we can't go on just by listening, it is my person who is called to respond; and therefore my responsibility is brought into play in front of a dense text proposed to us and which brings with it an experience.

Another testimony says, "In the last few years the times I went to the School of Community meeting without having read the text were more than the times I read it [a truthful confession, how many of us would need to do the same! He is honest here!]. So I decided to take the movement's directions (not just what I understood about Christ) seriously with all my heart, which doesn't mean just meditating daily but for example reading the book of the month (it had been at least fifteen years since I had done that!) and reading *Traces*. After the first few weeks of following what you pointed out to us, I realized that even though I wanted with all my heart to meditate on the School of Community's text at least five to ten minutes a day, too frequently I could not do it as I was overwhelmed by things to do. Therefore, for a few days now I have decided to do it at the beginning of the day, right after breakfast [the important thing is to do it: after breakfast, after having rested; ten minutes minimum, it is the bare minimum]. This work has helped me; I am slowly changing. This is not to say that I don't suffer from a sense of vertigo or unsteadiness when I stand before the Mystery who became man and also wants to meet me in this unimaginable, crazy way... Perhaps the words

from the School of Community that struck me the most were seven lines on page 21: ‘Jesus as a man acknowledges and accepts to be, Himself, His Father’s mercy [it’s an interesting example, a sentence that one should carry in one’s heart, in one’s mind].’ It was precisely this, to start the day with the desire to be ‘the mercy of the Father.’ These days I’ve been trying to look at everyone I meet with this desire: to be able to be, or rather, to accept being the mercy of the Father. Not that I used to treat people badly, but now my days feel less ‘tiring,’ I can’t describe it any better than my heart being happier.” So, it is a work that brings us back to reality, to treating people according to what we profess. Here is a third testimony, “At School of Community, at the very point that gave the title to the Fraternity Exercises, ‘*Christ is the life of my life*: in Him is summed up all that I would desire, all that I look for, all that I sacrifice, all that develops in me out of love for the persons with whom He has put me’ (p. 37), from the first reading and then thanks to Father Lepori’s intensely charged insights I thought, ‘Wow, how beautiful it would be if I really lived as if Christ were the life of my life, but I’m not capable of that!’ I understood, however, that such an attitude was a sort of obstacle, because it was as if I were once again entrusting to my own ability the possibility that Christ is everything to everyone. Instead, listening to the announcements, the Exercises, friends recounting their experience at School of Community, I understood that the fact that Christ is the life of life is not the outcome of a skill, but it is just so [it is what we have called ontology, something that precedes us]; He is, that is, He is the life of my life; whether I recognize it or not, He is. And so life, the circumstances I am given, the most significant events or the most difficult struggles, the people and opportunities I have, are given to me to discover this [reality is given to discover this, it is truly an adventure!]: He is already the life of my life; one understands this because when one lives with Him and for Him everything already takes on a different essence and enthusiasm [because He is present] and what I live serves me to realize this and to surrender myself, not to better myself, so that He become the life of my life, but rather to realize that He is already the life of my life, that without Him I go nowhere. In this way life has a different purpose, it is not a continuous effort to be a better Christian, but a great journey in which I have to go through everything that is given to me to discover that He is the life of my life, accepting every circumstance, and not fighting it, as a possibility and entreaty for Him to reveal Himself.”

It is a testimony that responds to our struggle; it forces us to a work and does not reduce the Lord to a product of our hands, but recognizes Him as something that we have discovered and that is given to us in an encounter.

Prosperi

This testimony and the first testimony that you read are very beautiful: the struggle is in the fact that it is not already possessed, but that is where the beauty of it lies!

The first series of questions is on the theme of happiness.

“On page 34 it is written, ‘So, man truly acknowledges what God is only if in all that he does he entreats God for being—and every action is entreaty to God for being, that is for happiness, for being.’ In the name of happiness I have seen dear friends leave their wives and children, saying they are finally happy despite the damage they leave behind them. I desire to be happy more than anything else. Yet, in this desire of mine, which sometimes can turn into pretense, there is something that does not add up. Is it a kid’s dream? How can the harshness of life not cancel this desire and how is it possible to live it fully? In front of those friends who have left their families in order to be happy, the world approves, the moralists condemn, most remain indifferent trying to increase the thickness of the armor that separates them from real life. In what Giussani says I sense something much deeper than the level with which these things are approached even among adults, but I don’t know how to unravel it, I don’t know how to grasp it. I ask for help regarding this.”

Santoro

There is a starting point which is as firm as a rock: life is made certainly for happiness. We must not ignore this: we are here for happiness, for the foreboding of a happiness, of a fullness. Jesus, Fr.

Giussani once said, “needs like bread that the people who follow Him have a taste for life” (cf. L. Giussani, *Is it possible to live like this?*, Vol. 1, *Faith*, McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal 2008, pp. 47, 131-132). We got up and moved for this. The journey towards happiness in this life is through circumstances and first of all through people; so the attraction towards a woman who is not your wife, she too is a gift God gives you to acknowledge Him. Here lies the heart of the problem, as a judgment must be involved: does fulfilling the claim of that irresistible attraction launch you into a limitless perspective, bring you closer to your destiny? Is it according to the design of the Mystery? Here, this is the structure of my reply, which I will give with a testimony of my own. I have been told to give examples, and I am also comfortable sharing them with you.

I went to Brazil, sent by Fr Giussani. I started teaching at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro. I taught Theology; in the Theology course there were also laymen and laywomen, and among the laywomen during my lectures there was one who was interested in what I was saying and in the novelty she found; although she was a follower of Liberation theology she was very struck, and so she came to see me at the parish, she started to follow me, she even came into the movement, then she told me, “Let’s go for a walk on the sidewalk of Copacabana”; and I said, “Wow!”

Prosperi

A Brazilian woman?

Santoro

Yes. And this one had it all, she wouldn’t go unnoticed, she was married with children. I even said to her, “Come join the movement,” I tried to get her to meet some of the others. She came, however the goal was a little different. So in this case, what is attraction? Real attraction has to do with your destiny. If it doesn’t have anything to do with your destiny, if it doesn’t have anything to do with the fullness of your life, if it doesn’t have anything to do with the story that the Lord has put you in, that builds up your life—with your husband, with your children, your work—then it is not true attraction. True attraction is a simpler and truer relationship with destiny. For you and also for the other person. My freedom at play was to say to her, “The help I can give you is to be happy in the condition in which the Lord has put you, is to invite you not to move to another path, that is, it is the help to live the circumstance that brings you closer to your destiny, closer to Christ, Christ made man and who has reached you.” This I repeated to other people who came to talk to me, “If God has put you on a specific path, if he has given you a wife and children, if he wanted you to share in his being a father, abandoning the path will never be a path towards happiness.” “Ah, but there is a sacrifice!” Sure, but it’s a matter of adhering to a judgment, otherwise that attraction—in itself good—without a judgment of what ultimately matters is blind and doesn’t help lead to happiness. So let’s help each other follow the true journey, the path to fullness. Because what then happened to me is that even through sacrifice (because all of this entails a sacrifice) the certainty of a truer horizon, a truer relationship opens up. And in this way that person’s journey also became lighter, thank God; certainly not thanks to me, I just tried to do what I could.

Let me tell you one more fact, which also happened in Copacabana. As a missionary I was destined to go to a suburban favela; then the cardinal, since I was to teach Theology, sent me to a parish in Copacabana to learn Portuguese, and there the parish priest wanted both Fr. Giuliano from Rimini and me to stay. So we started working and meeting people. In the mornings I had classes and in the evenings I celebrated Mass; normally there were a few ladies with gray hair, a few of our boys, someone from the community. One evening a beautiful lady comes in a low-cut outfit (a beautiful woman, in short!) and I think, “Jesus, what happened?” I give my homily, explain the gospel. To my surprise, after Mass this lady comes up to me and says, “Father, I was struck by what you said about gratitude. I am recovering from an illness and I came to church to thank the Lord. What should I do to respond to this gift and to follow the Lord more? Should I make an offering?” “No, no ma’am, you don’t have to make an offering. Next Thursday come to the School of Community meeting with a group of friends of mine.” And—struck by what I had told her—she came to the School of Community

meeting! She would normally come all dressed up, too, so all the men would notice her. She was a telenovela actress, the 8:00 p.m. telenovela—in Brazil there is a 5:00, 7:00 and 8:00 p.m. telenovela—the unmissable one, which everyone watches religiously! This lady came and began to become interested and started participating. Monique was her name. Fr. Giuliano and I accompany her and she started telling us about her entangled relationships. Then she said, “But your friendship is more beautiful than my mess! It’s more beautiful because when we’re together it’s like it’s a party, there’s singing, there’s this, there’s that, it’s something else!” And so she looked at her life once again, readjusted herself in her relationships, started taking holy communion again, out of a desire for a greater happiness, for an experience of a greater beauty. Then—look at the Mystery!—her illness, leukemia, came back, and the Lord called her; and all the *Tele Globo* actors came, and we met them. She was a means for an encounter for so many of her friends from that world, the strangest and the best: Milton Nascimento and others, people who came and became closer to the movement. She became an instrument of an encounter, and then the Lord called her. However, the title we gave her, thinking of Monique, is what we discovered with Leopardi: *Cara beltà*, dear beauty! *Cara beltà* is the closeness of destiny, even in sacrifice, because it was not easy—neither for me, nor for her—to take the straight. Indeed, what is needed is the experience of a more intense, more vivid, greater beauty. Sacrifice then is like the road to destiny, because sacrifice makes you love the other person as Christ loves them, because their happiness is their encounter with the Lord, is keeping on His path, is being in His embrace: “dear Beauty.”

So this is the path to happiness, it is a path in which one responds to the Lord. And in so many relationships I can see gratitude because I have been the Lord’s sign for a greater love, out of which emerge many vocations to virginity, to marriage, to a response, to the sacrament, faithfulness to the sacrament, faithfulness to the Father, love to the Lord as we have encountered it. For this is at the heart of Christian virginity: love for destiny, love for destiny without possession. There is no one else who speaks like this but Fr. Giussani. When Giussani speaks of sacrifice, he removes any shadow of moralism, because it springs from a greater passion, a greater impetus. So the journey to happiness is the path we are on; obviously we aren’t alone in this, we are not by ourselves.

I got another message from a Spanish friend of mine who says, “Dearest Fr. Filippo, as you said in your homily for Enzo Piccinini’s anniversary [I was in Modena, and nearby in Nonantola, I had celebrated Mass for the 23rd anniversary of Enzo’s *dies natalis*], in this journey we are not alone [we are not alone because our journey stems from a relationship]. Fr. Lepori also emphasized in the Exercises that after the encounter, Marta undertook a journey within a company of people and in time, with the passing of days, generations, this encounter eventually reached you. And it reaches me and makes me thank you for your perseverance during the fifty years of your priesthood.” This year I celebrated fifty years in the priesthood, of honored service to the Church of God. During the Mass in memory of Enzo I had said, “I celebrated fifty years and many times people say, ‘The day of ordination is so beautiful!’ and I say, ‘Of course it is beautiful, but fifty years later it is even more beautiful!’” by virtue of a journey, because life is a journey, it is not the joy of a moment, it is a joy that becomes greater in time, it is the joy of a journey through sacrifice, in obedience to the circumstances; the circumstances speak to you and you embrace them because you are not alone. In fact, my priesthood coincided with meeting Fr. Giussani and therefore with a history; we are not alone in the journey. And then she asks, “But how can we not be alone? Because we do not make ourselves, we are not made by ourselves. St. Irenaeus of Lyon said that every man’s story is the exact time needed for God to fulfill his creature. We are made. ‘I am you who make me,’ repeats Carras, echoing Fr. Giussani. We do not know how to get to fulfillment, we do not know the design. These last weeks I have been so struck by how people seek Him out so little in their lives. It is as if Jesus is saying to us, ‘is this all you ask of me? Do you think that is all you need? I came to give you me, to give you my presence, to give you everything: life, everything, as the Father gives it to me, and you only ask me for these little things?’” The question is to ask for His Presence because we are made of Him. This Spanish friend had finished rereading Nicodemus’ letters and concludes by saying, “So one day when we get to heaven [she has a serious illness] we will bear on our faces the cross and resurrection

that we remembered on June 6th on the 1st anniversary of the passing away of our friend Zatto from Rimini, who in just ten months of illness showed us the testimony of what holiness means. We are surrounded by saints, what is needed is a small but irreplaceable ‘yes’ to such greatness.”

Prosperi

Thank you, also because many questions touched on this very point: “How do I truly recognize the fundamental needs of the heart?” What Fr. Filippo told us with his experience exemplifies the “how” very well. The needs of the heart are indestructible (this is what we learned to recognize through School of Community) and therefore they cannot be manipulated or compromised; however we can confusedly identify them with feelings which sway us. It is a judgment which turns the heart’s need into self-awareness and thus makes you see reality for what it is, because the heart’s need implies awareness of our destiny—as you were saying, Filippo—. This is the greatest help in recognizing what these needs really mean: awareness of destiny. It is destiny at stake, not our feelings, not what seems to us to be most true, what seems to correspond to us the most. Sometimes awareness of our destiny demands something that immediately would not appear to correspond to us and it involves what you called “sacrifice,” that is, the affirmation of a greater good, the recognition of a greater good.

Santoro

Of course, the fundamental point was that when Monique joined our company she said, “This friendship is much more than all the other places I met before,” that is, it is something else, it is a place, it is an experience.

Prosperi

A second group of questions is summed up by this contribution, “Looking at my experience I recognize with certainty that my life and the lives of so many friends around me are marked and shaped by the encounter with a certain human reality, an exceptional and mysterious history, a human reality ‘in which the mystery of Christ is present’ (p. 37). I would like to ask then: what does it mean to ‘become aware [...] of the encounter we have had’ (p. 37), so that this experience of my own foreboding of the Mystery becomes the familiarity with Christ and the affection for the person of Christ that brought Giussani to say, ‘we must say, *You*, and *You, O Christ*, we must say to the man Jesus of Nazareth.’ (p. 39), to the point of ‘understand[ing] that He is the central point of everything, of the whole of my life [...] the life of my life?’ (p. 37)”.

Santoro

How to become aware of the encounter made? The first step is the simplicity of looking at our history. In the text, on page 37, Fr. Giussani says, “we must become aware of the event *as* it happened to us, of the encounter we have had,” become aware of how it happened in the encounter we had, become aware of our history. And then he says: so it was for me, “I was somehow **channeled** into a companionship that made and makes the mystery of the Church immediate for me. It is therefore an emergence of the Body of Christ. [channeled: without the encounter of that Mass that evening Monique would have gone for another channel, she found a channel she would never have thought of, however the encounter happened]. It is the company we call vocational, that is, the company that involves because it generates and is generated by the experience in which the charism has touched me.” He then quotes St. Augustine: “*In manibus nostris sunt codices, in oculis nostris facta,*” he is referring himself to the Gospels to be read and the people to be met and followed. “In the whole life of everybody there is a fact that has meaning, a presence which has been an influence throughout life, a presence tending to influence the whole of life: it has enlightened the way of conceiving, of feeling [...] This is called an event.” And this happens again, it didn’t just happen in Copacabana, it happened when I went to Petrópolis afterwards, when I went back to Taranto, it happens in the present in encounters of all kinds as a bishop in Taranto.

We need a certain familiarity with this history in which we found ourselves, we should not take it for granted. There is a need for a familiarity, a familiarity which is a preference, a special preference. And that is exactly what it is. To become aware of the event, that is, a familiarity that provokes us. Everything in our life is really a great opportunity to become aware of what has happened to us, of the gift that has happened to us.

How does it happen? How it happened to us in the past and how it happens today is what puts us back on the right path, on the path that the Lord is indicating to us, because we have everything we need in order to live this experience. Let's move on.

Prosperi

Another question:

“In the chapter ‘Christ is All and in All,’ in points 5 and 6, it struck me very much that Fr. Giussani, both in describing Jesus’ relationship with the Father and our relationship with Jesus and with others, uses the verbs ‘acknowledge’ and ‘accept’ at different times, referring to the reciprocity inherent in friendship. So many relationships that I experience every day do not always contain this dynamic of mutual recognition and acceptance, and so they often become empty and formal.

What exactly does it mean to love destiny and that when I love the destiny of another and this person recognizes and acknowledges it, then there is friendship? And if the other does not recognize that I desire his destiny and does not accept it, does that mean there is no friendship? But isn't that closing the doors to Mercy in the dynamic of friendship?”

Santoro

On page 35, still on friendship, the text again says, “Every human relationship is either friendship or otherwise it lacks something, it is defective or false.” But is it not an exaggeration to say that if it is not friendship, it is defective or false? There is a progression: every human relationship first is lacking, then it is defective, it is missing something. But here Fr. Giussani explains well; again on page 36, speaking of reciprocity, he says, “Accepting and welcoming this gift makes reciprocal the love that He, who gave it to us, possesses, displays, and shows. Accepting it is the love that we show to Him who gave us the gift. [...] friendship is a reciprocity of gift, of love, because for a created being, like man, the supreme form of love for God is to accept that you are made by God, to accept to be, to accept being which is not one's own but is given.”

There is a great aspect of friendship here, and that is that He accepts us as we are, we are the first to be accepted as we are, He calls me “friend” as I am. But think about this (this is something that has always moved me!): Jesus says “Friend” to Judas when he is about to betray him, so Jesus loves everyone, He loves even those who are about to condemn him. Of course, there is no reciprocity there, but that is the lack of response to the gift. Then there is the relationship with another poor man who is St. Peter who betrays him, and when Jesus says to him, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” (he says it to him three times), Peter replies, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” (John 21:15-17). This is friendship, this “yes” is a reciprocity. But do you get it? One of them goes and betrays Him and He calls him “friend,” and then says, “I have called you friends”, “You are my friends if you do what I command you, I no longer call you slaves” (John 15:14-15). So—beware!—doing what the Lord tells us is not moralism, it is morality.

Many times we say, “No, if I have to do something I don't ‘feel like doing’, I'm acting out of a moralism.” But are we like kids who say, “I don't go to Mass on Sunday because I don't ‘feel’ like it?” It's understandable for a teenager, for a kid, but if you as an adult say, “No, that's a sacrifice, I have to ‘feel’ like doing it...” What do you have to feel? Instead do you see the greatness? It is the offering of Christ's friendship given to you at that moment, in the supreme sacramental gesture of the Lord's Passover. A body, a community of people is needed to remind you of the Lord's Passover, and you feel it correspond to your heart. The heart is made to find a corresponding response, and it is the greatness of the response that makes the relationship complete; love, the love that is fulfilled in reciprocity is accepting to be made, accepting to be, accepting being not as one's own, but as a given.

So the experience of friendship is the fulfillment of affection. And then the Lord continues (John 15:12-17), “I no longer call you slaves [...] I have called you friends” “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. [...] It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you,” and that is what I remind all friends who are struggling in their vocation, “But you have been chosen”. It is an invasion of a great tenderness and love. I’ve said enough.

Prosperi

Here’s the last question, “In the School of Community we read, ‘Hence the obedience that safeguards order in society. But what really safeguards order in society is authority: *Let every person be subordinate to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been established by God. [...] For rulers are not a cause of fear to good conduct; Be subject to every human institution for the Lord’s sake.*’ (pp. 27-28) I understand that God is the ultimate source of authority, and it is not one’s own authority. I understand that God does not cause evil to man, but allows it; I understand that through evil the mercy of the Mystery is revealed. But, as a History professor, who has to speak tomorrow about the Nazi regime and Stalinism, how can I explain all the evil they objectively brought on to man and at the same time affirm that we must submit to human institutions because ‘there is no authority except from God?’ Or, even more current, how can one say that Putin in Ukraine must be followed, as an institution of government, ‘for the Lord’s sake?’”

Santoro

This question brings us back to current events because as always, and rightly, the School of Community is not a far-removed and lofty meditation, but has to do with the everyday, including war. Let’s look at how the Pope is acting in this situation, let’s look at what he is doing these days: is he calling us to submit to human institutions? No. To the judgments of the self-righteous ones? No. He is judging human authorities, with every intervention he is making a judgement. He is praying and inviting us to pray for human authorities to bend to the will of God who wants peace. God wants man to be happy and therefore he wants people to be at peace. So it’s not a going along with the current events... if you have to talk about Nazism and communism, you have to express a judgment, as the Pope is expressing a judgment about the war in Ukraine: in no uncertain terms, and the more time passes, the louder his voice becomes. It is important that within the situation we maintain this judgment: not a “neither with Ukraine nor with Putin,” position, but a similar position to the Pope’s, which keeps peace as a priority over everything else. And then within that, the urgency of negotiation, the urgency of all other means, and in this way the Pope, insofar as it is possible, says, “I’m going to Kiev,” when it is no longer possible he says, “I’m not going there anymore,” if then an alternative solution opens up he goes there; he is fully immersed in reality.

In history we are not exempt from the drama of choosing: we have to choose, we have to intervene, just as we are called to intervene for elections. We have the municipal elections in Taranto; all the parties (almost all, in short!) came to the Bishop and of course one accepts them, what would you do? You start a dialogue and say, “Make sure the common good, life and health are at the forefront. No more pollution, let’s change course. And then let’s save jobs. And then no more exaggerated redundancy funds,” etc. I don’t get on soapboxes, that would be too much... But one has to intervene in reality, one doesn’t stand by; one doesn’t remain passive, but one intervenes, one intervenes with a judgment on how to carry out the good of the person and the good of society. I said, “But are any of you concerned about these thousands and thousands of kids leaving the South to go to the North or to Europe and elsewhere? But why don’t you create serious technical and higher vocational training institutes?” etc. In short, you enter reality starting from a judgment, which is the judgement that the Holy Father has in every situation and that we learn within our companionship, within our friendship.

Prosperi

If I may, I would add a very small note. This emphasis by Giussani is really about the human structure that makes us up. Because it is one thing to conceive of ourselves as an authority over our own I, it

is another thing to conceive of ourselves as dependent on God and therefore also on the circumstances in which God puts us. So within any circumstance, respecting any circumstance, we can live—as Fr. Filippo said—the reality that is given to us to the fullest, where the criterion of judgment is not necessarily dictated by what our boss may say, but by the correspondence between the given circumstance and my heart, that is destiny. Each one of us has the opportunity to acknowledge within the path of life that through following someone, we are helped to go deeper and deeper into who we are. Because I believe that the big issue here is not so much between a good and a bad authority; we can all understand this difference when we hear talk about Stalin. The problem is not so much that, the problem is to recognize oneself as dependent or to conceive oneself as alone.

The last question that emerged from the School of Community reading concerns the theme of mercy: “What does it mean that Mystery as mercy remains the last word on my parents’ illness or war?”

Santoro

Well, let’s finish with this question about mercy. Mercy remains the last word, Don Giussani said so in the 1998 meeting of the movements with John Paul II. Here we touch the very heart of the mystery of reality. In the mystery of reality there is this mercy within, at the root of it all. To answer the question, I recalled a fact that Fr. Giussani recounts several times. The episode narrated is the story of that mother who met Fr. Giussani in the confessional and told him, “Two years ago, my husband died. I had two children. One went crazy because of his father’s death and killed his brother [just imagine how dramatic!]. Now he is in a prison for the criminally insane in Bologna. All of a sudden, I am totally alone.” The church was all bare, but it had a large crucifix behind the altar; and Fr. Giussani, after a few moments of silence (as what can one say in the face of such situations?), said to her, “Listen [...] now please get up, go and sit right there in front of that crucified man, and look at Him: if you have something to say, say it to Him.’ She would not move [...] he heard her utter, ‘You’re right.’” (L. Giussani quoted in A. Savorana, *The Life of Luigi Giussani*, Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press 2018, p. 144). This is the point: mercy is a presence, which introduces a crack of new light into a deep darkness, and it is the presence of Christ’s cross and resurrection. Think of the friends we lost to Covid! How many I had to say goodbye to without even celebrating Mass, welcoming the hearse at the church door amidst the weeping of their wives, children, and friends! Truly a heartbreak! And there one must rely on the mystery of reality. “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?” These words are pronounced in that weeping and with all one’s heart. Do you understand? If the Lord were not present, it would all be for nothing.

But then I was reminded of another, milder example contained in Padre Pio’s biography. Padre Pio gives the example of a woman, a mother weaving a tapestry at the loom, the child is standing at her feet, asking her why she is putting so much effort into such an ugly piece [because the child from below sees all the interwoven threads]. The child could only see a flood of threads, weaves, warp and weft which were a great mess. Then the mother took the child in her arms, showed him the work from above, from the right perspective and not upside down as the child saw it, no longer all mixed up, and lo and behold, the threads were joined together to form a stupendous work. Christ entrusted Himself to the Father, and we also entrust ourselves to Him and are with Him. Do you see? We are just like that child looking at an unfinished image, but someone takes us in their arms (like that mother) and holds us, and makes us say goodbye to friends who leave us with a broken heart; but not without hope, as we are literally taken up in an embrace. This is just as true for our Christian friends from Nigeria: it is truly a huge pain and suffering. It is the same, the same. The press didn’t talk about it, they only talked about it on the first day and after that they ignored it, but that’s the way it is. So many times we see the warp and the weft all mixed up: “But how? How did this happen? This doesn’t make sense etc.”; and then we rely on the Lord, on his historical presence, on the journey we’re on in the life of the Church, of the charism, just where Christ has made himself present. And therefore the Mystery, ontology, sustains us and saves us.

I really wanted to end by reading another text by Fr. Giussani, which gives the reason for everything he did: “Beyond the Wall of Dreams”, a 1991 writing on why all the work he did came about; he

explains it to the young people like this: “The beginning of all that was born [...] is the desire that people understand [...] what their hearts are made for; that people may understand a little more the Destiny for which they are made; [the surprise in the morning is knowing that I get up for a destiny which is good]; that people may understand a little more that life is a task.” We are not self-made, ontology: we are not self-made. “We did not make ourselves. [...] The urgent needs that spur us on within our personality have not been built by us. [...] To claim happiness in life,” says Fr Giussani, “is a dream. To live life walking toward happiness is an ideal. [...] The ideal, on the other hand, points in a direction that we do not determine [the heart follows what corresponds to it, correspondence points to our destiny]. [...] Following this direction, even with strenuous effort [we said it today: through sacrifice, with effort] even going against the waves [...], the ideal with the passage of time, becomes real. It becomes real in a different way than how one would have thought; always different, always more true; [what a great thing! At fifty years old it is not the same as when I was twenty-four...]. [...] Happiness is not a present event. It is the great promise of the future; it is destiny. However, in life, the experience of reality insofar as it is in harmony, insofar as it is made for destiny, insofar as it makes us tend toward destiny [...]. This destiny has a name in history: it is called Jesus Christ. Vocation, therefore, is embracing all circumstances by obeying, adhering, carrying out what Christ wants from you”. (L. Giussani, “Beyond the Wall of Dreams,” in *CL-Communion & Liberation Magazine*, 1 (1992): pp. 3-9)

In short, we are on a journey—together, not alone—which is bringing us to a fullness, because He has come to encounter us: God all in all (as we have been told) through Jesus, Christ, who is all and in all.

Thank you.

Prosperi

Thank you Fr. Filippo.

Work of School of Community. As anticipated at the Fraternity Exercises, this summer through September we will be working on the text of the Exercises, “Christ, the Life of Life.” The booklet with the reflections proposed by Father Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori and the assembly can be found as an attachment to the June edition of *Tracce* and on the CL website in pdf and ePub format. Currently the booklet is available in Italian; translations into other languages will be posted as they become available.

In working on the Exercises let’s continue to keep in mind the text *To Give One’s Life for the Work of Another* on which we have been working this year.

In September we will give new indications regarding the work of School of Community for the coming months and any other possible meetings online.

Fr. Giussani Centenary Exhibition. The digital exhibition created for the Centenary of Fr. Giussani’s birth, presented at the Fraternity Exercises, will be available soon.

I invite everyone to visit the exhibition, giving themselves time to enjoy the richness of the many audio and video contributions it contains. Let us be struck by these, starting with the sincere question of being able to discover first of all more about who Fr. Giussani is. While visiting it, let’s be free and creative in thinking of new ways in which to propose the content to our friends, relatives, colleagues, both by spreading the link to the exhibition personally or through organized gatherings in which the content of the exhibition may be presented.

Community vacations. As we know, this summer it will finally be possible to propose community vacations with more freedom, given the reduction of anti-Covid restriction measures. In a dialogue with the other leader friends concerning what we are most interested in deepening during these moments of living together, we thought of proposing a “title” to everyone, which can serve as a useful trail: “The Teacher is here and he is asking for you.” (John 11:28) The sentence recalls Fr. Mauro’s

provocation launched to us at the Fraternity Exercises regarding Martha's journey and suggests that the vacations, too, may be the verification of that "taking personal responsibility for the Charism?" to which we have been called by the Church.

We thank again Monsignor Santoro for his availability and for the precious help he has been willing to give us during these months in the work of the School of Community. Thank you!

Santoro

Thank you, thank you! Preparing for these meetings is a lot of extra work which has been first and foremost useful for myself, so I am glad to have this task that has been entrusted to me. Let's pray to live this present moment well, let's say a *Glory Be*.

Glory Be
Veni, Sancte Spiritus

Thank you and have a good evening.

Prosperi

And have a good summer!

Santoro

Have a good summer.