

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, December 16, 2015**

Reference text: L. Giussani, Recognizing Christ, in J. Carrón, A PRESENCE WITHIN THE GAZE, Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation 2015, pp. 75-88.

- *Come hai fatto*
- *Di più*

Glory Be

What allows us to recognize Him in what happens before our eyes? What allows us to say, “What a beautiful day I spent with you [...] A loyal Friend came for us” (*Di più*, lyrics and music by Claudio Chieffo)? What allows us to recognize His voice among many voices, His words among many words? What does that silence introduce? What allows life to be never-ending?

I wanted to ask you if you could explain what it means that “recognizing Christ requires work,” as you repeated to us at the Fraternity Exercises in Rimini. Indeed, I live my days by following my emotions, without asking myself specific questions. Then, when circumstances change, I fall apart right away. Exceptional facts happen, and I immediately feel that my heart is bursting and asking to live, not just to exist. In moments like these, for example, I start to read the School of Community text again – but then the moment passes, and thus even School of Community is set aside and slowly forgotten, and the idea of reading it becomes a moral imposition. I don’t understand why I cannot be faithful to this work. It cannot be a duty. When we tell each other to start working on something, I immediately feel forced into another moral imposition. I don’t understand why a change does not begin in me. Is it because what happens is not powerful enough for me? Or does the problem have to do with me? Can a person be incapable of being surprised? Is it possible that my freedom is so lazy that it cannot go beyond the simple emotional reaction? And if this is true, then how can I change? I need to be able to ask someone who can answer me, because I understand that I’m not getting anywhere, and I could stay in the Movement for my entire life without growing, always adrift.

As you say, this is a serious problem. Because it’s not that things don’t happen, but if what happens is only an emotional response, then after a while one falls apart. And then, as you keenly perceived, only a moral effort remains, and we already know where that can lead us. Is it a problem of the event, or is it my problem? Or does the problem have to do with both? Because if one doesn’t grow, then he cannot recognize Him. This is something that we have to think about, because – as Fr. Giussani says – “Recognizing the presence of Christ requires work, in the literal sense of the word [so that there is no misunderstanding].” We often think of the event as such powerful, clear evidence that our freedom shouldn’t need to move in order to recognize it. For us – we have said this often in recent years, but the problem persists – event and work are almost opposed to each other, and as soon as it is necessary to make a move, we think that it is moralism. But, friend, when you fall in love with someone, do you want to go and see him again the next day? Is this moralism? Is it a moral imposition? Or does it come from recognizing what happened to you, which wasn’t

simply an emotional reaction? This is where we often have a hard time. Fr. Giussani continues, “The recognition consists in *continuing to take the initiative* to recapture the value that this event has for our existence.” The event is not the end. It is necessary to “*continue to take the initiative* to recapture the value that this event has for our existence.” Imagine if John and Andrew had not done this, if they had not followed the impetus with which they had gotten up that morning – that is, the desire to see Him again. It happens with any event. If we paid attention to the song with which we began, what does an event provoke? It transforms “time into waiting,” said Modugno’s lyrics, sung by Mina. Waiting for what? Waiting “to see you again,” that is, a waiting that doesn’t leave us blocked. Our movement is born from there, not from a moralistic effort: from an attitude – in this sense, yes, a moral attitude – from the desire not to lose the beautiful thing that happened. That is why Fr. Giussani says, “It is a strange task, because it requires commitment to a constant new beginning: ‘*constant*’ because *His presence is gratuitous*, we don’t create it [we don’t produce it], it is an event that happens and asks to be recognized unceasingly. Usually, instead of recognizing Christ’s presence, we conjure up our own images of how it should be, images that are inexorably outdone and shattered. Thus, one who grows weary, because he doesn’t understand as he would like, leaves [it is better for us to understand, because if we don’t, then we end up leaving!]. On the contrary, one who follows, changes, and for him everything is transfigured. The work that we have indicated – recognizing the presence of Christ – *is a capacity to understand beauty* [anything but moralism!], *not a capacity to understand our own project*. Beauty is the attraction of truth, and truth, which is Christ, constantly exceeds our expectations. Therefore, the capacity to understand beauty is by its own nature open, striving to affirm ‘something greater’ than ourselves that continues to pull us away from our own mental images. After all, there is nothing more terribly disappointing and destructive than a project of ours that we have relentlessly pursued and achieved. Life’s vocation, then, is only one: to be [open] [...], not to settle down [like we want to] or to possess. The truth that we possess is something Other than us, that therefore pulls us away from the fixed image that we are seeking [...], asking us to adhere and be open to a journey that is always new” (L. Giussani, *Un avvenimento di vita, cioè una storia* [An Event of Life, That Is, a History], EDIT-Il Sabato, Rome 1993, pp. 162-163). Our openness to this journey is what confirms the nature of what happened to us, because if you meet someone who is just like the others, who doesn’t awaken in you the desire to make a journey, who doesn’t awaken an expectation in you, then that says it all. The problem is not that now you have to do something out of moralism, but that you don’t have an adequate reason to move! Because, in the end, it’s not valuable enough for you to want to set all of your human energy in motion and seek Him again. That is why it’s not an imposition, but an affection born of a judgment, born of the recognition of the value that what happened has for you. For this reason, when, after a while, the emotion disappears, you should ask yourself: what happened to me? Was it only an emotional reaction, or was it something really true that causes me to grow more attached than the day before, and thus I seek Him again, I take the initiative to recognize Him once more? The things that sometimes

happen right after one has had an encounter with something exceptional help us to recognize what kind of work is involved.

The CLU Spiritual Exercises in Rimini 10 days ago were my first experience with the Movement. I was invited by some friends, and I went without the faintest idea of what would happen. I could never have imagined what did happen. From the first evening on Friday, from your introduction, I was shocked by your words, I was moved, also because your words were very true for me. They were true for my heart, because for me it was like being reawakened from a state of numbness, as if someone were really making clear to my heart something that I had always tried to push away. In fact, as you were saying, we often risk falling prey to boredom, to resignation, to this longing that one expects to go away, but that actually continues to reappear. I felt the desire to take hold of my life in a different way, to live more intensely.

Do you see? The fact that happens causes one to take hold of her life.

*Yes, because ever since I started college, I have always had very full days, but I always lacked something that gave meaning and unity to everything that I was doing. Everything ran the risk of becoming dull, meaningless. What I heard during those days brought down a wall within me. I realized this in the subsequent days, also because of the total openness that I felt toward the people who had invited me, the friends with whom I was able to open up and identify all of my weaknesses and my fragility, which was something that I had always found very difficult. I saw something wonderful in everything that was happening to me, and I felt like I was in the right place, with the right people. I would have liked to prolong this experience, but at the same time, I couldn't wait to go home and tell my loved ones, my family and my boyfriend, what had happened. My family was very open to this, they loved the fact that I was so happy; my boyfriend's initial reaction, however, was different. He said that he had never seen me this happy, and he did not accept this happiness because somehow he wasn't part of it. As I returned to my daily life, I realized how difficult it was to make these people who have always been close to me understand what I was living. I was able to do it, though, and I still am, I am trying to make clear how a change has happened in me. I am aware of how I am using my time differently, how I see things slightly differently, and I am sure that this experience will not end. Faced with the question of whether it is just a feeling or an emotional reaction, I can respond firmly and with certainty that what I have experienced is real and true. Desires and needs have emerged, as well as a sense of faith that I strongly feel to be mine. I have just started reading Fr. Giussani's *The Religious Sense*. I was particularly struck by two sentences: "I inquire in order to know something, not to think it." And a little further on, "The sane man, instead, wants to know about the fact, to know what it is, and only then can he also think it." I see this as a perfect phrase to describe my situation of seeking something, somehow, in order to avoid conforming to a preconceived thought. Furthermore, in support of this, I found the comparison with "elementary experience" to be perfect: as long as something corresponds, it is true and I can trust it. I just wanted to add how I feel different. I loved the expression "I am the same, and yet I am also another." I recognized this in these days as I*

spent time with some friends whom I love very much, friends who belong to – let's say – another reality. I realized that certain Saturday evenings spent in a certain way no longer satisfy me, they don't give me that something that I found with other friendships that make me more true, and I want to make this last.

Thank you. As you can see, what is this work that we mentioned before? It means that, after having lived an experience like this – in which a person has experienced fullness, has perceived a newness that can be experienced – right away, in front of the reaction of some (who are open) and others (who don't understand), she starts to ask herself: was it a feeling, or was it real? Doing this is not a duty, no – it's that life doesn't spare me the work, because I have to explain to myself what happened to me when faced with other people's objections, with which we can sometimes be complicit. That is where the journey starts. That is why one feels torn, because the struggle for this recognition begins. Anything but automatic and mechanical! And this doesn't just happen now, with the collapse of evidences. It happened in exactly the same way to the man born blind: as soon as he was healed, he had to start fighting with everyone and everything, he had to take the initiative before the others and himself to recognize what had happened to him. Is this out of moralism, or is it – as you say so well, because you are already reading *The Religious Sense* with this understanding! – out of the desire to know? The sane man wants to know about the fact, to know what it is, and only then can he also think it. He always wants to know more. Thus, as you read *The Religious Sense* with this question, you recognize what you need in order to answer. And you pick out elementary experience (“This corresponds to me”) the very first time that you read the book! This is how this recognition continues to happen in our life. But we want this recognition to remain constant, and at times we are disappointed that it isn't as constant as we would like it to be.

I am a father of five. As an engineer, I work many hours a day, and lately even more intensely. These are the circumstances, and I tell myself: if these are the circumstances, and that is where the Presence is, then I want to get to the heart of them. I am happy to work and to live like this. Obviously, in order to stay in front of this Presence, I need to do some work, as we were saying, and so I go to School of Community, I have some friends who awaken me, who give me some input, and who make me see this Presence again. However, there are days in which I enter into a tunnel, and I feel like I am wasting time: things to do, project deadlines, the phone ringing... Moreover, I am particularly stressed out, anxious – I like to do things well, but I also understand that, in any case, there are moments in which one wastes time. My wife and my children always recall me to that Presence, and yet, I still forget and enter into that tunnel. Therefore, there are days in which there is no book, no person who can awaken me from this forgetfulness. In a moment of discouragement, one Monday morning at work, I wrote to you: how is it possible not to forget, and to keep my gaze constantly fixed on that Presence that gives meaning to everything? I am asking you again.

What do you think we can do? We often conjure up an image – as Fr. Giussani said before – of how it should be, and we think that this recognition should be completely constant in time. One

can recognize Him as the morning begins, when he opens his eyes or in praying the *Angelus*, and then spend the rest of the day almost forgetting. Fr. Giussani already dealt with this question years ago. Is it possible to live a constant relationship with this Presence? Is it possible, in your words, “to keep my gaze constantly fixed on that Presence that gives meaning to everything”? To keep our gaze constantly fixed is what we call “memory.” In *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così? [Is It (Really?!) Possible to Live This Way?]*, Fr. Giussani says, “Memory doesn’t mean that one thinks of Him in every action that he does. This is not necessary. It is necessary [to begin with] that you love this. That is why we can understand [he makes this digression] why the ‘yes’ of St. Peter is the origin of morality – the ‘yes’ of St. Peter, not the analysis of the how and the when, or of whether the laws were obeyed or not. Morality is St. Peter’s ‘yes,’ which is the expression of a love [introducing St. Peter’s “yes” during the Holy Year of Mercy is perhaps not so wrong, and it is an occasion to understand more]. [...] Thus, it’s not necessary to think of Him in every action, but to desire this memory, to desire the awareness of this Presence, to love the awareness of this Presence.” We think that this is not much, and thus Peter’s “yes” looks too fragile. No one would say that this is the origin of morality. We think: since it fades after a while, then what kind of origin is it? Or, when one says, “When are you coming back?” we don’t believe that this is the origin of something new. We really don’t see the value that Fr. Giussani attributes to these things! “The first answer [...] is that this memory [which doesn’t mean remembering at all times] must be lived as the affirmation of an instinctive attraction to God, an instinctive attraction to Jesus: St. Peter’s ‘yes.’ Even if you were to get 999 of 1,000 actions wrong [I don’t know if you have ever beaten such a record] – in the sense that 999 out of 1,000 are distracted, and not only distracted, but contradictory, because they are harmful – the Lord, after the 999th mistake, would say to you, ‘It is enough that you desire my presence, that you desire to be aware of my presence. If you desire it, if you sorrowfully desire it, then ask me. But not in the sense that, before each action, you have to stop and ask me. When you stop and – through my grace, after all! – think of me that once or twice a day when this happens more easily to you, then ask me that that memory may happen more and more, that it may grow.’ The more you seek to live with this memory – yesterday you thought about Him twice, during Communion and before going to bed; today you have already thought of Him four times... But it’s not a matter of numbers [which is an oppressive measure], what matters is the value toward which the question is tending – the more you try to think of Him, you ask to think of Him, and the more your ground seems to be raised higher and become richer. [...] Thus, in time [according to a design that we don’t know], [...] the more the repetition of your actions becomes substantial, the more it becomes habitual” (*Si può (veramente?!) vivere così?*, BUR, Milan 2011, pp. 430, 432-433). But do we still believe in this method? Or was Jesus totally wrong in entrusting Himself to Peter’s “yes,” in placing everything on Peter’s “yes”? Did Fr. Giussani make an even greater mistake in following Him? Do you see how the challenge becomes more and more radical? Each person must look within his own experience, at what makes him move, because it is only the event that causes one to move. Even if it happens once a day, amid all of the distractions, you have to start by following this, amazed, completely amazed – not by the 999 times

in which you forgot Him (what is so mysterious about the fact that your fragility is fragile?), but by that single time in which you were pulled out of your distraction. You will begin to be amazed by that instance, you will begin to desire it, and you will forget the mathematics. Then, when you are overwhelmed because you are very busy, or because you are wasting time, you will start to seek Him again, full of gratitude. Why? Because becoming aware of one's lack is already a grace that happens again.

I came back from the CLU Exercises feeling a little odd. Usually, I come back happy and glad. On the contrary, this year I came back feeling a little angry, because you told us once again that the method for being present to the grace of those three days is following. Following, again! After all of these years in the Movement, I still have to be told to follow, follow. Lately, I have been having a hard time with many things, especially in my studies, and I say: where is this following taking me? I was a bit angry, but...

We all know the meaning of this following in your words.

Sure, but it didn't take much.

It really took very little!

Going home on the bus with my friends, singing, and then going back to college, tentatively starting to study, beginning to risk myself a bit again, I could see that all of my objection was blown away, because I really understood that I need...

So, following wasn't so complicated!

It didn't take much, because this phrase kept coming to mind: "Notam faciet gloriam nomini Sui in laetitia cordis vestri" (He will show the glory of His name in the gladness of your hearts). I really need this, because being with these friends, living like this, changes me. I really need to kneel every day before the Bread and the Wine, because this reality is truly incarnated, and if one treats it with due respect, then it answers you – it is true that not much is necessary. After this premise, here is the question. I was struck by the video of Fr. Giussani, especially when he says that work can and must become obedience. So, how can I make this work become obedience? Once one recognizes the flesh of Christ within things, how can one follow Him in daily life? After the Exercises it is easy, but I cannot always need an exceptional fact, because I really need to grow and follow all of the time.

Let's try to follow experience. What happened when you recognized this presence in the flesh?

In following Him, I was happier, this anger was swept away.

In the e-mail that you sent me, you say, "At a certain point, I understood the beautiful nature of following."

I always reduce following to what...

Perfect! It is a moralistic reduction of following. Why do you reduce it like this? Because you separate yourself from the experience that you are having (singing on the bus, studying at your college, etc.). Either Christianity is a present event that I recognize and that constantly draws me toward a beautiful experience of following, or it's not. If it's not, then you will grow weary of it.

Thus, to make work become obedience is, to use your words, to understand “the beautiful nature of following.” Period. If you separate the experience that you have from the words that you use, then the words that you use acquire a different meaning that is no longer authentic. To make work become obedience means that you obey the modality with which the Mystery is drawing you now. If you obey the modality with which the Mystery is drawing you now, then the experience that you have is very beautiful, and you don’t desire anything else. This can happen in the great gesture of the Exercises, or in a gesture as simple as singing on the bus; or in front of a gratuitous gesture, or in seeing things that happen in front of us and amaze us. Then, it is enough to follow what He continues to do before our eyes.

However, what do we need in order to see all of this? In fact, we often can’t even dream of seeing these things.

Before last week’s Exercises, I was filled with a great sense of dissatisfaction; I felt an emptiness in my life that drove me to ask what this lack was that was generating this emptiness in me, and how I could be happy. However, I realized that, even if I was beleaguered by questions, taking myself seriously (even in the most ordinary things), asking, was necessary in order to respond to that sense of emptiness. It is true, questioning myself about everything was hard work, but the more I went on, the more I understood that I couldn’t let go of that question, because otherwise everything seemed meaningless. So, when I arrived at the Exercises, your introduction already seemed to be about me, my urgent problem, my questions – as if you already knew everything about me. Then, the next morning, during the video – which was very moving – I felt a sense of great anger, because there was a moment in which Fr. Giussani, in speaking of several negative circumstances like illness, said that Christ acts through these circumstances, too, because He carries out Another’s design. Life is vocation: it means to fulfill something that God determines for each of us through the circumstances. This wasn’t enough for me. After lunch, I got a phone call from my mother who, in telling me the results of her latest MRI, said that her illness seemed to be stable, not showing any new lesions. She was clearly telling me all of this with great joy, but I was so dissatisfied that I couldn’t find a shred of happiness within me, I couldn’t be happy, not even for her. I was just angry, unhappy – so much so that, even if her illness had disappeared forever, I wouldn’t have been happy right then. This drove me crazy, I was almost disgusted with myself. In the end, though, I came back from the Exercises with the awareness that, in any case, a fact had made itself present among us, and that this companionship was crucially necessary for me...

Why? Go on. I asked only to prepare your listeners, so that they pay close attention.

Necessary because it makes me open my eyes.

Because it makes you open your eyes!

Christ and the Movement are beginning to affect my life more and more. Yet, the answer that Fr. Giussani gave is still unclear to me. So I ask you: how can one have the certainty with which to

face any sorrow or adversity, as Fr. Giussani did? How can one have such certainty that, even when God's plan seems totally negative to you, you can stay before it in that way?

Does anyone want to answer?

I wanted to tell you about a very simple fact that happened with the mother of a boy who is in kindergarten with my son. Before the summer, in order to say good-bye to the other families of my son's kindergarten class, we got together for pizza. This woman – a woman of integrity, an industry CEO – and I were telling each other where we were going on vacation. Without paying much attention to what I was saying, I answered that this year I was going to the beach with my husband's brothers and parents, so that if I felt poorly we wouldn't be alone. Appropriately, she asked, "Why would you feel poorly?" She didn't know that I had been diagnosed with an illness that often makes me feel physically ill. After I had explained it to her, she was astounded and asked, "Excuse me, but how can you have this beautiful face? Why aren't you distraught? How can you take care of your young children with such serenity? I wouldn't be able to go on living." And then she started to cry, telling me that her little nephew had died, and that she had never recovered, that everything has become burdensome and full of anguish. She insisted on asking me questions, she was really impressed by my face – and I wasn't doing anything exceptional. She had just seen me in my daily life, while I was eating pizza and taking care of my children. I answered her that I don't feel desperate, but that instead I am certain that what is happening to me cannot be against me, because I have met Jesus and He has never deceived me, but rather has led me – through some facts, and through the companionship of some people – to become aware of Him, aware of Him in everything. It is Jesus who has given me the grace of faith, but it is a journey. I told her that I belong to Communion and Liberation, which is the place where I am educated to deepen my relationship with Him. It is Jesus who molds man's heart so much that He gives me joy even in the most unthinkable hardship. Thus, I couldn't do anything but invite her to come with me to the place where I am educated to this gaze, and I invited her to the Beginning Day. In the end, she didn't come – she wrote to me that she couldn't stop thinking about my face every day, but that she didn't yet feel up to undertaking this journey, maybe someday. I answered her that, in any case, we should get together soon, and not to stifle this wound in her heart. A few days ago, we celebrated the birthday of another of my sons, and I invited her. In seeing our friends, how we stayed together – we weren't doing anything special: some of us were playing with the children and some were chatting, asking questions about life, all things that often seem totally normal to us and that we take for granted, but that are definitely not automatic – in seeing my husband's and my gladness in a situation that is not always easy, she told us, almost moved, "All of this is impossible. Something extraordinary is happening here."

Thank you. Do you see? When we agree to be educated, these things happen: we can look at the reality of an illness with this gaze that leaves that woman totally amazed. What allows one to have this certainty? The journey that she has made. Letting herself be constantly introduced to a new gaze. "It is Jesus who has given me the grace of faith, but it is a journey." I belong to the Movement,

“the place where I am educated to deepen my relationship with Him.” Jesus molds her “so much that He gives me joy even in the most unthinkable hardship,” to the point that it becomes visible in her face. It is true that you are not the one “doing” it – it is the result of something that He molds, but this being molded is the fruit of a journey to which you made yourself available by following.

*Since I work at a university, this year I had the good fortune of attending the CLU Exercises again. As I watched the video Recognizing Christ a second time (after the Fraternity Exercises), I felt a strong reverberation, and I was moved. We worked intensely on the text of Recognizing Christ during the past month, but watching it is a different story. On Saturday I thought that, in hearing someone speak like this of what John and Andrew did after meeting Jesus, one could say, “What an imagination Fr. Giussani has! How inventive!” On the contrary, Fr. Giussani really had that experience, he kept having it, he was speaking about himself and his own life, perhaps thinking of how he had treated his friends and his students. This seemed to me to be something out of this world. What a difference there is between reading and having an experience! I can say that I had the experience of Christ present, and I also thought of the many texts that circulate, and how I sometimes worry about getting them all – but to see him there in front of you is something else, really something else. On Saturday this was given to me; to another person, something else is given. When he speaks of Christ as the ideal of life, Fr. Giussani speaks of gratitude. In listening to him again, I am grateful, because he made me think back over my story. On Sunday, during the summary, you spoke of the Lord’s preference, that God has chosen us, and you said, “We are here because our presence documents God’s preference, which has overcome all of our resistance.” How true this is if I think back on my husband’s and my stories! And this moved me again, because He has chosen me. I can say that this truth entered my life years ago; it is an absolute certainty. A friend of ours would say, “It is a point of no return – once passed, it is no longer up for discussion.” Even if I am grateful for this, the step toward pure gratuitousness of which you speak is sometimes difficult, even with the people who are most dear to us, because there is a shadow of expecting something in return, there is the desire, the good desire, to be satisfied. I feel a little stuck, I almost wallow in the disappointments. Does this mean that I am not grateful? But I am. I came back from Rimini with a full heart, but the first daily disappointment crippled me. With regard to this, could you explain what this phrase of Fr. Giussani’s means? “He wasn’t yesterday. He is today. He isn’t today for me, but He is today for you, whatever your position: change it, if it needs to be changed!” (L. Giussani, *Recognizing Christ*, in J. Carrón, *A Presence Within the Gaze*, pp. 77-78). Because one can read it in a slightly moralistic, ethical way, in the sense that I have to do something, to make an effort: I have to be more available, I have to change the way in which I do things. Instead, I think that there is much more to it than this, also because being open to change doesn’t hold up in the long run, I can’t do it. So, can you explain it to me? Do I perhaps need to change the way in which I look at and treat myself?*

In order to fully understand this, one has to grasp the connection between gratitude and gratuitousness, which is a way of saying what the Christian event is, the nature of the Christian

event – that is, the nature of that event that imposes itself so powerfully, that changes us so much, that fills us with such gratitude, that from this gratitude, gratuitousness is born. It is what Fr. Giussani quotes: “I have loved you with an everlasting love, and I have had mercy on your nothingness” (cf. *Jer* 31:3). Without recognizing this constantly, it is difficult to change, because everything that we do would be moralistic. Fr. Giussani says that only if we become aware of the nature of what Christ does with us, only if we constantly look at Him, can we then act like Him, be capable of this gratuitousness, set in motion by this being moved. This gratuitousness is the fruit of the presence of Christ, the change that Christ provokes in us. That is why the Pope announced this Holy Year of Mercy, as if to say to us: look at Christ, because without looking at Christ, you cannot have mercy, you cannot have gratuitousness, the ability to embrace, to forgive, to give witness to the kind of difference that Christ introduced into the world. The change is not moralism, but rather the expression of being increasingly taken hold of by Christ. A university student wrote to me that he was disappointed as soon as he arrived at the Exercises, because they put him in a room with a guy whom he totally disliked. Then, “I began to open myself to this possibility: what if this guy is not just his limit? And what if, through this, the Lord doesn’t just want to thwart me, but is asking me to change and to learn to look at the other simply for the fact that he exists? In that moment, my position changed radically [it’s not moralism, but the possibility of a newness]. I was curious, and I had the desire to verify that hypothesis [a different way to enter into a relationship with everything emerges]. The next morning, we watched the *Recognizing Christ* video, in which Fr. Giussani states with great emphasis, ‘I only say that this event or this Presence is today – today! That human flow we have talked about, I bring it into your life today. There is nothing but God, God alone, yesterday, today and forever. A great event, said Kierkegaard, can only be *present*, because it is not the past, a dead person, which can change us. If something changes us, it is present: “He is if He changes”’ (p. 78) [if we separate gratitude from gratuitousness, then gratitude becomes a thing of the past. Instead, it is something present, and we can see it because it changes us]. Hearing those words enlightened and moved me, because it made me say: if I was able to change my position with regard to that guy, it is because Christ happened. He changed and changes me, and therefore He is present [so much so that every Christian in the first centuries used to say: since what changed in me is so powerful, it can only be the work of the Holy Spirit]. On the way back home, I realized how powerful this is: if Christ is present, then He has to do with everything – everything is an opportunity to be in a relationship with Him. When I got home, instead of being harsh with my sister, as I usually am, I discovered myself looking at her with more openness and tenderness [gratuitous!] and, in front of her limit, I told myself: if Christ loves you, sister, the way that you are, then I accept you as well. However, I notice that this new gaze in which my eyes participate is absolutely not to be taken for granted. I am not capable of looking at things with Christ’s gaze [that is why everything is often reduced to moralism: because we don’t look properly!]. I happened to read Cardinal Scola’s pastoral letter *Educarsi al pensiero di Cristo* [*Educating Oneself to Christ’s Thought*], and there, on p. 47 [quoting the famous text of the *Letter to the Romans*, Chapter 12, where it says to offer our body as spiritual worship],

it says, ‘We recognize every day how this “spiritual worship,” that is, offering our life in Christ, with Christ, and for Christ, is not automatic. For this reason, Paul, with great realism, admonishes the Christians who are in the world [...] not to let the “world” conform them to its “scheme.” We cannot be conformed to the world when it proposes plans that are destructive toward the individual, the human family, and creation itself. They originate, as Paul’s Gospel thought has shown, from the original enigma of man’s sin, from his wounded and bewildered heart, which remains exposed to the seduction of self-affirmation at the expense of everything and everyone. Saying “yes” to the encounter with Christ and following it entails a permanent conversion (*metanoia*), which means a change of mentality, in order to increasingly assume Christ’s person and His existence as one’s own criterion for thinking and acting. [...] The whole experience of human life, in its various aspects, enters into the liturgical sphere, acquiring an extraordinary dignity.’ It is true. This gaze is not at all automatic. And not because Christ is not present, but because I am a sinner and I can’t see well, I see only through the hole of my wound. I have to follow Him humbly, like John and Andrew, seeking that permanent conversion. The more time goes by, the more I realize how the experience of the Movement affects the deepest root of my being. Even when I am distracted or blinded by a thousand things, I can begin again from this clear judgment: Christ is present and everything belongs to Him.” This is the new way of looking to which Christ introduces us. It causes us to look at everything in a different way, and makes everything lovable again, because we discover it in its truth. It’s not that Christ sees only our troubles and our evil, and then in spite of everything, He grits His teeth and tells us, “I love you.” Christ sees what we don’t see! That is why, without being introduced to Christ’s gaze, to Christ’s thought, it is difficult for us to live this newness in the relationship with everyone. Christmas is a fantastic opportunity to participate, by asking, in this event in which we can recognize His presence. When we are introduced to this new way of looking, we will begin to see things that we don’t currently see, that we don’t recognize, that go by unnoticed. Christ’s presence is precisely there, in many things that we take for granted. However, we don’t see Him because of our reduced gaze, because we are not educated to look with Christ’s eyes. In fact, to explain many of the things that we recount to each other, it is necessary for the Word to become flesh and dwell among us.

The next School of Community will be on Wednesday, January 20th at 9:00pm.

We will continue to work on Fr. Giussani’s lesson *Recognizing Christ*. May this text accompany us during the time of Christmas, so that we can live it in Fr. Giussani’s company.

Christmas Poster. As you have seen, this year’s image – Kandinsky’s painting – was a surprise. It is certainly easier to look at a classical image with the Virgin Mary, Baby Jesus, etc. and stop at the first sentimental reaction or at the visual impression that makes us say, “I prefer this,” or “I don’t like this as much,” already knowing – or thinking that we know – what is contained in the image. This time, instead, we are called to question ourselves, to work a little harder, asking ourselves, “What do you see?” and then, “Why do you see what you see?” If one asks this question,

then he finds the answer, which is never unequivocal – because art is not mathematics – but requires the encounter between two freedoms. The fact that one gets stuck in front of an image like this tells us that we are not used to this dynamic – and not only in front of art, but also in front of life and circumstances. Sometimes the children are the ones who explain the poster to their parents! So the choice of this image is entirely within the journey that we are making, with the heart striving to see what the Lord is telling us through life’s circumstances. The choice of an image can also contain an indication of method that is valid for everything. And this can change how we propose the Christmas Poster, as the opportunity to share a question. In the December issue of *Traces*, you can read this suggestion: “This drawing [...] [expresses] in a clear and pure way a dynamic that is fully real and human. This dynamic is the attraction exercised on the line (our life) by a point (the Other, the unexpected Guest). Something in Kandinsky’s representation, inasmuch as it is dematerialized, produces, as he, himself wrote, ‘a vibration of the heart.’ Perhaps the curves that accompany the trajectory could be read as the representation of this vibration.” It is an ironic attempt. Perhaps a classical image would be more convenient. I don’t know if it would have more of an impact, but at least it would be more convenient.

It helps to look there, at that decisive “point” that attracts each of us, as the Pope and Fr. Giussani tell us in the two phrases that we chose. After all, the Poster is not just an image unaccompanied by anything else.

I remind you of the important charitable gesture that we propose during this period: the AVSI Tents, which this year are for the refugees.

During these months, we indicated *La bellezza disarmata* [*Unarmed Beauty*] as the Book of the Month. This will continue for a few months, in order to allow you to finish reading it.

With the opening of the Holy Door, the Jubilee Year of Mercy has begun. Let’s not just be concerned with what gesture we will do. It would be wrong to reduce the Year of Mercy to some gestures that we will be able to do together. What Pope Francis invites us to is a conversion of the heart. It would be a shame to miss this opportunity, because we need mercy, and this year can be an opportunity to learn what the mercy is that we all need. Who taught us this more than Fr. Giussani? As we have already started to say today, let’s think about how he spoke of “Peter’s ‘yes’” in *Recognizing Christ*.

Precisely for this reason, for the precious content of this lesson, we have decided to make it available by having a DVD of *Recognizing Christ*, which will be attached to the February issue of Traces, on the occasion of the 11th anniversary of Fr. Giussani’s death.

We will also have a special sale of it during a weekend in February. The copies of the magazine have to be reserved by January 15, 2016.

Merry Christmas to everyone!

Veni Sancte Spiritus