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10

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LITTERAE COMMUNIONIS



A PATH THAT NEVER ENDS

As the Jubilee is closing its doors we treasure the embrace of mercy that we have experienced during the last year. A concrete reality possible in every moment of life and of history.

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e Liberazione for the texts

by Luigi Giussani and Julián Carrón

CLOSE UP

A YEAR WITHOUT AN END

The Jubilee Year of Mercy will conclude on November 20th. But “the work to open ourselves to mercy” will not stop here. From following the Pope to the refugees who “reflect what we are,” we hear from **FR. MAURO-GIUSEPPE LEPORI**, Abbot General of the Cistercian Order.

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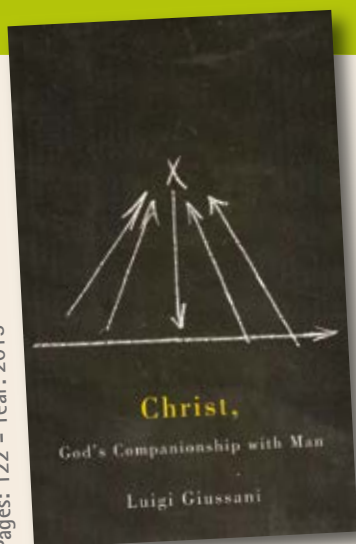
LUIGI GIUSSANI

This volume is a selection of the most significant writings by Monsignor Luigi Giussani (1922-2005), founder of the Italian Catholic lay movement Communion and Liberation, which is practiced in 80 countries around the world.

Presented by Julián Carrón, Giussani's successor as head of Communion and Liberation, *Christ, God's Companionship with Man* is the most succinct introduction to the breadth of Giussani's thought, including

memorable passages from works such as *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, *Why the Church?*, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, and *Is It Possible to Live This Way?* Many speak of Giussani as a friendly presence, a man who believed that it was possible to live in faith every day and in any circumstance. As a writer and religious scholar who was deeply devoted to his work, Giussani's teachings and reflections have come to generate worldwide recognition and support.

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A TRUE DIALOGUE

The most recent to write in favor of political dialogue was *El País*, Spain's foremost newspaper, in an important editorial, the title of which speaks volumes ("*La conversación que necesitamos*"). It came out just before the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party chose responsible abstention on the second investiture vote for Mariano Rajoy, of the centrist People's Party, allowing him to gain the simple majority needed to return to office; by doing so they avoided a third election in a year and brought to an end the political stalemate that began in December 2015, which involved 300 days of failure to reach compromise, exchanges of vetoes, and reciprocal delegitimizations that showed no concern for the nation's need for leadership, and that were so harsh that the Spanish daily newspaper said it was time for change. "In the face of the polarization and reciprocal hatred, we want to speak up for the reconstruction of a common space for pragmatism and reforms, a place where there can be an exchange and explanation of reasons, ideas, and solutions that help find a way out of this situation," wrote *El País*: "The solutions to the problems are complex, will require attempts and errors, and will never be 100 percent satisfactory. But they exist. We just need to look for them. For this, the conversation needs to change." In other words, there is a need to re-initiate real dialogue.

These words were written in Madrid, but they closely resemble many calls heard in the United States, split by the meanest electoral campaign ever, in Great Britain divided over Brexit, in Europe tormented by fears and a level of egotism that prompted Dimitris Avramopoulos, EU Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs, and Citizenship, to say "the crisis in which we find ourselves is casting doubt upon the foundations upon which we have built our democracies: our values of openness and equality, our fundamental freedoms and, even more important, that which unites us and holds us together."


By now, this is the question. The factors that we took for granted in the *polis* no longer apply. Everywhere, it is necessary to return to the foundations. In order to rediscover what supports civil co-existence, we must overcome "the logic of *a priori* alignment that blocks a true comparison of ideas and reasons" and "recover the meaning of living together," as urged in the CL flyer that came out recently in Italy, in advance of the December referendum on the reform of the Constitution (you will find the flyer at the end of this issue). *The other* is not a threat, an obstacle, a barrier: the other is a good for me. In front of the wounds of our society, it is only by running the risk of truly opening ourselves to those in front of us that we will understand ourselves better and find stability once again. In the words of Fr. Lepori, Abbot General of the Cistercians, interviewed in this issue of *Traces*, at the end of the Year of Mercy: "The Pope in this year helped us to see that, by welcoming others, we become a place to dwell. Now we found our certainty on the things we are sure of that are in our hands, rather than founding it on a relationship, on our belonging to someone. We too feel threatened, in a different way, by others, because they break down our bubble of false security."

Instead, we discover our true substance precisely in the encounter with the other. In order for this to happen, continues Fr. Lepori, "there is a need for places, for communities that incarnate this embrace that can love and welcome. This is the reason for the Church in the world, for mission, which is to communicate an experience."

This is not simply a reminder of moral rules and regulations, but a true need, one that is very concrete. It is not just a matter of deciding how and whom to vote for (be it in the American presidential election or the Italian referendum), because *the day after* that vote, regardless of whom you voted for, we will still face the same problems as before: the economic crisis, war, immigrants, the holes in democracy. We will have to live, seeking the good of everyone. This can only be done together. **T**

LETTERS

THE FARMER AND THE TOMATO HARVEST


 I am a physical therapist. A patient came to me with back pain. He is a farmer and he tells me that he doesn't think that I can help him. He really just wants the minimum number of visits possible so as not to waste any time. I accept the challenge. By the end of the first session, he has begun to relax a little and he tells me about his work and how much he loves it, and how frustrated he is not to be able to give his 100%. In the following sessions, he is even more relaxed and talkative, and I understand that his economic situation is not good, so I decide not to charge him for the sessions at the end of the therapy cycle. One day he arrives at the center where I work, he takes my arm, pulls me aside and gives me a hug. He says to me, "You have given dignity back to my work, and as a man rediscovers himself in his work, you have given me back my dignity because now I am well and can pick tomatoes. You don't know what a gift you have given me." He still didn't know that I intended to give him the therapies as a gift. Curious, I look at him and ask him what I had done out of the ordinary. He begins to cite, one by one, everything that I had done during the sessions, but above all, the kindness with which he felt treated, listened to, and loved. I immediately thought of the passage from September's "Page One" that says, "It is that to which we belong, in which we participate, that defines our cultural expression." I am like



that, I have had that attention for my patient (without even really noticing), because all of my life is defined by the encounter with Jesus through my friends in School of Community, even if sometimes I forget or devalue or don't want to believe it. I am aware of saying things that are so much greater than I am, but I am also aware of having participated in an event greater than myself and not explainable exclusively through my capacity to do my job.

Damiano, Bologna (Italy)


ON A PILGRIMAGE FOR THE FIRST TIME

 When I told a few friends that the pilgrimage to go through the Holy Door was to be my first in my lifetime, none of them believed me and all looked surprised. They did not believe that a mature Catholic Christian could possibly not have done a pilgrimage. This made me start wondering what the pilgrimage would be like. The real challenge came when Joakim asked me to head the team preparing it. Why me, who didn't even know what is expected? A week earlier, during our community's exhibition on the Prodigal Son, a young man asked me after I had explained the last panel, "What does one do before and after going through the door of mercy?" I choked out a few words in confusion before I realized that I didn't know the answer. I rushed to my friend Masu for help and he walked both of us through a few steps that need to be taken. It suddenly hit me that although I was very involved in the logistics, I had really

never understood what the pilgrimage could mean for my faith. It was this realization that made me change my approach: I still needed to face the logistical challenges of preparing for the pilgrimage, but now did so with a new awareness. As I drove to make a reconnaissance tour of the path a day before the pilgrimage, I was very conscious of what was in front of me. Identifying the points where we would stop, I visualized where the crowd, the choir, and Fr. Valerio would all be standing at each stop. I wanted it to be beautiful and also that all would follow the path with the same enthusiasm I had. The day of the pilgrimage I understood how greatly merciful the Lord had been to me in making me part of this faithful crowd, following the lead of the Pope and Fr. Giussani. The exhibition, the pilgrimage, the annual Spiritual Exercises (especially the part we're doing now on Peter's Yes) made deeper sense. I would be nothing without this Mercy of the merciful Father.

Peter, Nairobi (Kenya)

DISCOVERING A NEW PATERNITY

 I wanted to tell you about the death of my father. His name was Pedro Aguiar Pinto; he was a university professor of agronomy, and a diocesan responsible for CL in Portugal. For several years he published a blog on topics of faith and together with my mother, he prepared hundreds of couples for marriage. He led Schools of Community and every year he would organize the Movement's pilgrimage to Fatima. During the last pilgrimage, a few days ago, since there was no



AT SCHOOL

DIALOGUE ACCORDING TO POPE FRANCIS

In the public school where I started working this year, we had a faculty meeting two evenings ago. At one point, the religion teacher said that Cardinal Betori, Archbishop of Florence, was coming for a pastoral visit, and he was thinking about organizing a meeting between the cardinal and the students. Immediately a very heated debate started about the matter of laity. Someone said that since we are a public school, the archbishop cannot participate (last year an imam, along with a rabbi and a priest, participated); someone else said that since we are surrounded by Catholics, we shouldn't put further pressure on people's consciences. I added to the discussion by stating that I didn't see anything wrong with meeting the cardinal, who as a representative of a religion and of a community of believers, would doubtless have something interesting to say to young students. Furthermore, if a teacher, within the context of his subject (in this case religion) would consider meeting the cardinal to be didactically useful, this would be legitimate. To my surprise, many people expressed support for my points. In the end, we voted to have the cardinal come in the afternoon for an optional meeting. I went home happy, not only because of the probable visit, but because the issue of laity had been the topic of discussion. Then I wrote a letter to my colleagues and distributed it to everyone, raising a lot of interest. Those who thought like I do thanked me, but the most beautiful thing is that I had interesting dialogues with many who do not think like me. While I was talking with them, I felt inside me the spirit of Pope Francis. In these years, following the Movement has helped me to look at him and to identify myself with him, in his life, more than in his words. And little by little, it's as if his life has entered into mine. And so, in the dialogue with my colleagues, I didn't want to be right, but to understand what moved them, what spark of truth held them there for an hour, getting them worked up about the cardinal's visit.



Pietro, Florence (Italy)

room for everyone, he decided to stay overnight at our country house, where he died of a heart attack at the age of 61, in the arms of a great friend. I wanted to tell you that this and other signs of the Lord's preference for my father's life and for our family have been so clear, and that these signs saved us. Between the difficult life of one of our children, affected by a rare disease, and the discovery of my mother's tumor a couple of years ago, our worries about health did not revolve around dad. So his sudden and unexpected death left all of us perplexed, but certain that life is gained when it is surrendered to

the Lord. This frees us from the fear of death! Nothing can be stolen from us if it is already ours in eternity. The willingness of my parents to build the Kingdom of God has always been normal for me, because I saw them live like this. But what was for me normal reveals itself, upon his death, as an abundance that could come only from a life consumed by the love for Christ. The extent of his relationships with many people I didn't know, who met him at the university, in the Movement, or because they were anonymous recipients of the newsletter, revealed itself as a paternity

that I thought belonged only to me. For me, the predominant feeling was not one of being an orphan, but of having gained more brothers and sisters. "You don't know me, but your father was the professor who taught me the most," "I'm an avid reader of your father, I'm praying for you," these are only a few examples of people who visited me trying to console me. Today I understand better what the Church is, how it was born, and how it is reborn from the blood offered by the saints. And today I say with more awareness: Our Father...

Inês, Lisbon (Portugal)

J CLOSE UP



Jesus carrying Judas, Capital at the Basilica of St. Mary Magdalen in Vézelay, France. The images on the following pages are from same church.

A YEAR WITHOUT AN END

The Jubilee Year of Mercy will conclude on November 20th. But “the work to open ourselves to mercy” will not stop here. From following the Pope to the refugees who “reflect what we are,” we hear from **FR. MAURO-GIUSEPPE LEPORI, Abbot General of the Cistercian Order.**

BY ALESSANDRA STOPPA

A full-grown sheep can weigh over 200 pounds. As much as a person. “Carrying one on your shoulders is quite a sacrifice.” Fr. Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori, Abbot General of the Cistercian Order, dismantles any romantic image we may have of the Good Shepherd who, leaving everything to go and look for one lost sheep, “then places it on His shoulders and skips through the mountains whistling.”

The realism of the Gospel tells another story, in which bodies have weight, words have value, and actions profundity. “In that sheep, I see my own ‘heaviness.’ Or I think about when others seem to be a weight on us. And yet, we are loved.” We are forgiven, placed on His shoulders and

carried. Just as Jesus carries Judas, who betrayed Him, in the medieval capital at the basilica in Vézelay, inspiring Pope Francis to say, “He accepted people as they were, not as they should have been.”

On November 20th, the Holy Doors throughout the world will be closed and the Jubilee which began last year on December 8th will conclude. It’s impossible to measure its fruits, but Fr. Lepori explains to us why this time of grace “doesn’t end here.” His gaze fixed on the Gospel, he sees the Holy Year as analogous to the “space” Jesus created as the crowds pressed in, when He asked the disciples to be

able to speak from a boat a small distance from the shore.

How does Jesus’s action help us to understand this time dedicated to mercy?

We, like the crowds, would like to touch Jesus and see an immediate result, like magic. Dedicating a year of our faith journey to one theme, to a concrete reality, is like allowing the space Jesus wanted—space to listen, to

give us time to become more aware of mercy and to see what it requires of our freedom, both in accepting it and in offering it [to others]. I’m impressed by how Jesus asks for >>



Padre Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori.

» a boat, not to run away from the crowd, but because the people only wanted miracles and weren't listening to Him. He came first and foremost to appeal to man's freedom, and so it's essential that He can speak and be heard. It's essential that men and women, each of us, place ourselves in front of Him in silence. Even when it comes to our immediate expectations.

What did this Jubilee mean for the life of the Church?

It was the chance to enter more deeply into a mystery. A deepening understanding that we need, not for the sake of having a Holy Year, but because it's vital for us. The Pope put mercy back at the center of our lives, and he did it through his actions and the actions he asked of us, making us put things into practice, not only in where we focused our attention, but in our experience. Primarily by giving us opportunities to go to confession, to obtain an indulgence, to meditate on this mystery and live it, including through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, present in many places in very incarnate ways. In that sense, the Year of Mercy doesn't end here.

Could you explain that a little more?

We've become more aware that mercy is a concrete reality. It's the mystery that's at the heart of the Church, and we are absolutely in need of it. The Jubilee was technically shorter than a year, and this helps us to realize that the issue wasn't living "a Holy Year," but rather living a Christian life, being re-awakened and refocused with an awareness that's possible in every moment. So, the important thing is that we don't let this experience of mercy or the work we've done to open ourselves to it stop here.

What did you understand the most

The Pope declared this Holy Year in order to face the wounds of the world and of the Church: both the wounds of sin and those inflicted by history, by wars and catastrophes. One of the most critical aspects is that he asked us to realize how man first needs to know he is embraced.

in this year of going deeper?

The Pope declared this Holy Year in order to face the wounds of the world and of the Church: both the wounds of sin and those inflicted by history, by wars and catastrophes. One of the most critical aspects, in my opinion, is that he asked us to realize how man, before analyzing and defining his malaise, first needs to know he is embraced. I find it really beautiful that in the prologue to his Rule, St. Benedict depicts God as the One who, in the midst of the peoples, cries out, "Who is it who will have life, and desires to see good days?" Mercy is this invitation from the Lord. It's a proposal made to men and women just as they are, right in this moment of history. Anyone who responds "I do" can experience this.

And after a person says "I do," what follows?

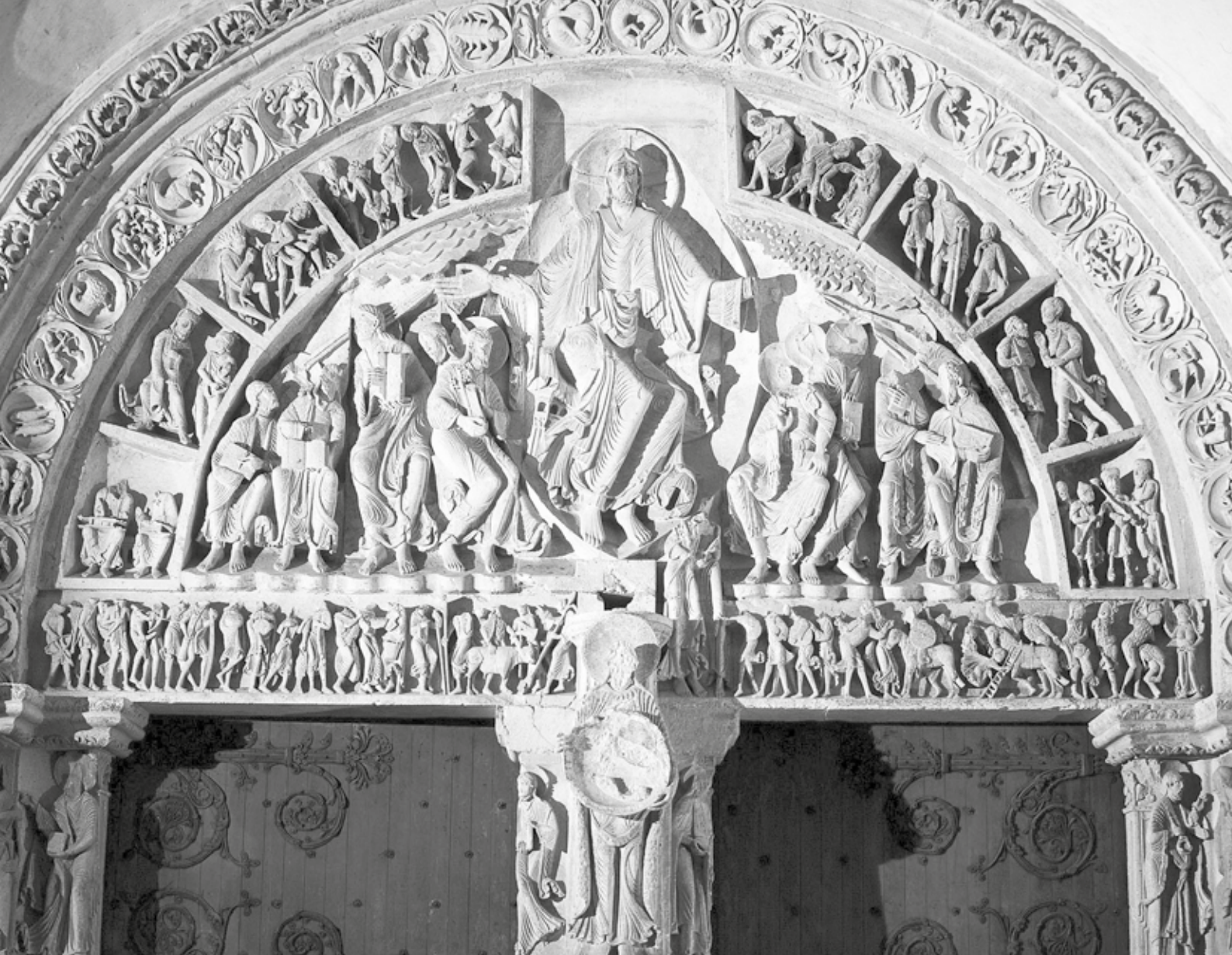
St. Benedict writes, "God says to you, 'If you will have true and everlasting life, keep your tongue from evil and your lips that they speak no guile. Turn away from evil and do good; seek after peace and pursue it.'"

So the answer to our asking for happiness is a road for us to travel?

The answer is a path of conversion; a path to keep us from giving in to the tendency we have inside not to be merciful. In the end, it sometimes seems like the Church doesn't respond to man's needs precisely because she offers a path. It's not a miracle machine—when it is seen like this, it grows fragile; you end up with proposals and experiences that don't help people to grow, to become free and mature. When you offer a solution that doesn't become a path of conversion, of freedom, the person is still fragile. The Church proposes a road to true happiness, not to instant satisfaction, like what our society offers. Responding "I do" to God, who wants us to be happy, means being aware of what our true need is. We're confused about the identity we give ourselves, we equate it with thousands of small desires, when it is instead a desire for the infinite: for the happiness that only God can give. So to truly say "I do," a person has to act in a kind of silence, he or she has to renounce pleasures that try to substitute for happiness.

The Pope always said that this would be a privileged time if we learned to "choose 'what pleases God most,' in other words, His mercy, His love, His tenderness." What does it mean to make this choice, to have this preference?

The Prodigal Son—and really, all of us—isn't capable of preferring his father on his own; he responds to his father's preference for him. And there is no preference that's not within the context of mercy! The son returns asking only for a job and something to eat, but in forgiveness he discovers the fullness of life: in choosing the father, he receives everything. The older brother chose to prefer something else. Up to that moment, he didn't prefer the father, nor did he allow himself to be preferred. He gave



his affection to other things: friends, a young goat, his half of the inheritance. The fullness of life, however, lies in a relationship, which is a grace that neither son produced himself. It's gratuitous—a free gift. This choice, this preference, is a matter of letting our affections, including the desire we have for life, be converted and directed to the Father. This is what we can hope to have learned from the Jubilee: we always have to begin with God's preference for us, with what we are to Him.

What themes stuck with you in a particular way throughout the Holy Year?

I was struck by the fact that, while we were going deeper into the mystery of mercy, we continued to have the

images of refugees crossing the Mediterranean by boat placed in front of our eyes. This humanity in all its misery, at the mercy of the waves, shows us as a mirror would what our situation is in life: the refugees reflect what we are, our current state, because it is first of all we who are floating through reality without an anchor, with no stability. Deep down, these migrants reveal the lack of stability that keeps us from offering them a place to dwell. I don't think it's that Europe doesn't know how or doesn't want to welcome them; I think they're almost incapable, they don't have the means. These people come by sea, but they don't end up on solid ground. We continue to leave them floating, even once they arrive on the continent, because we can't offer

them a place to dwell if we ourselves don't have one.

And what does the Jubilee tell us about this situation?

The Pope helped us to see that, by welcoming others, you become what you have chosen. The thing that can give us stability is taking the risk to welcome. By welcoming others, we become a place to dwell. Now we found our certainty on the things we are sure of that are in our hands, rather than founding it on a relationship, on our belonging to someone. We too feel threatened, in a different way, by others, because they break down our bubble of false security. Meanwhile, our true solidity is in the relationship with the Father. This is mercy: to experience that within >>

» this belonging, I receive a solidity that will never be taken from me, that nothing and no one can rob me of, and because of this I can welcome everyone and forgive any slight.

How do you experience this solidity that cannot be taken from you?

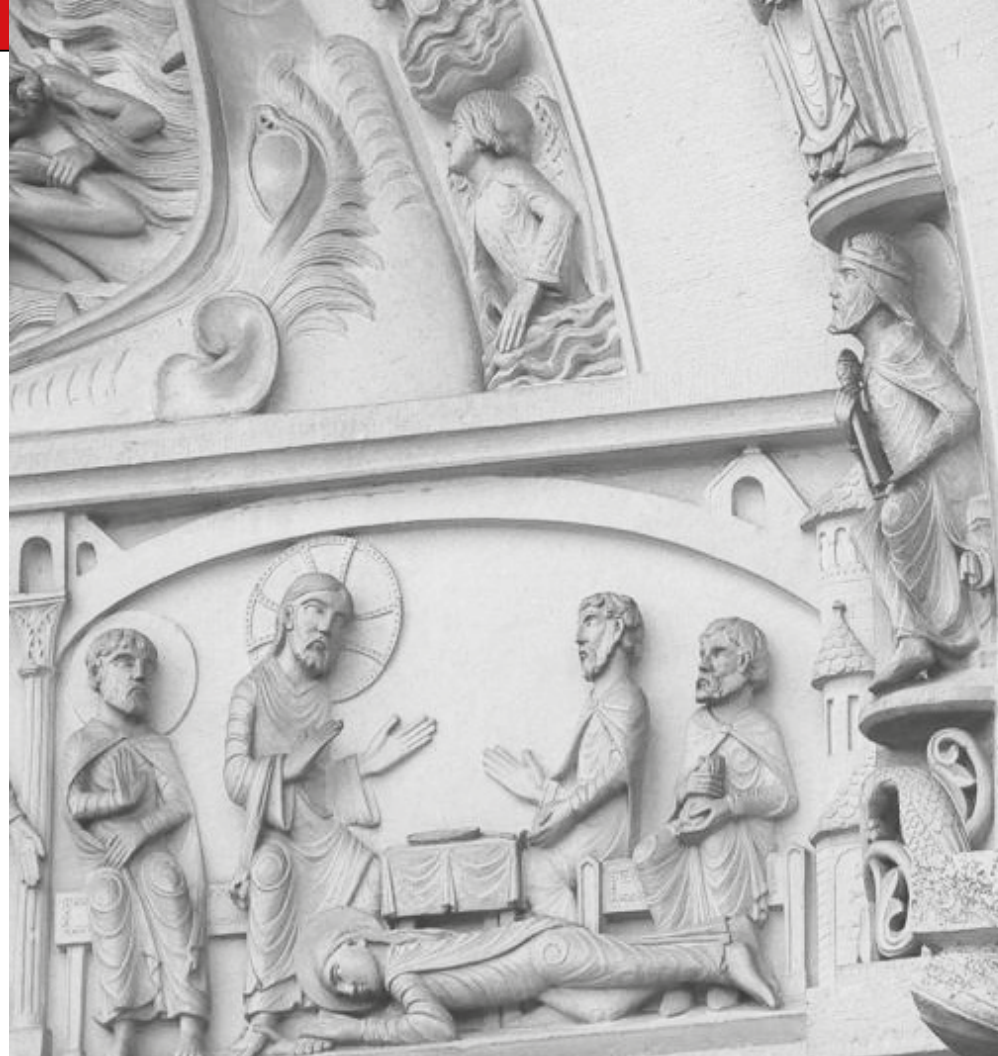
Precisely in belonging to the Church, where I experience the Lord's mercy. It helps me to believe in this mercy, to ask for it, and the Church bestows it upon me, first of all through the Sacraments and through a fraternal communion. The Church allows me to have an authentic experience of this reality, which is a reality to which I can return, in fact it is an experience that you really have in "returning" after you've fallen short. This opens me to others who are different, who disturb or wound us.

Many people don't even know what the Year of Mercy is. How can this experience reach everyone?

This touches on the entire mission the Pope hopes will come out of the Jubilee: that mankind should know mercy. Just as there was a need for a Holy Year, there is a need for places, for communities that incarnate this embrace that can love and welcome. This is the reason for the Church in the world, for mission, which is to communicate an experience. So then, it's important to have had this experience, that during this year we've had this experience.

Because this is the only way to communicate it?

We're complicated, and we think that communicating this experience is more difficult than the forgiveness that we have received. The point is to abandon ourselves to this simplicity of communicating a love that is given to us. We go back to defending what we're sure of so quickly. It's as if, the next moment, the Prodigal Son started to place his certainty back in the things he re-



gained, forgetting that now what constitutes him is the embrace he received.

In speaking about mercy, you referred to an episode from the life of St. Benedict. When the monks of Vicovaro tried to poison him, he stood up with "a kindly face and serene spirit" and said, "May God have mercy on you, my brothers."

Benedict can react like this because he drew from his own experience of mercy, which penetrated deep within him: his heart is identified with this mercy. This is why his face was peaceful and his spirit serene. He cultivated this memory of God who forgives us for everything, and so the first chance he got he communicated this experience. And so a deadly situation suddenly becomes a proposal for life.

One of the biggest challenges is that of living out the relationship between truth and mercy. What did the Holy Year teach us about this?

And how can we let mercy win out?

We are too much in the habit of thinking that discipline is a prerequisite to begin a path, when it is rather the result of this path. If, in my life, I've understood and accepted certain values and moral norms, it's because first I was loved, before the law was given to me. The law has never saved me; rather it is mercy that has taught me that even these precepts are a desire for my good. In consecrated life, for example, a person feels chosen, preferred, and called to say "yes," and then realizes that truly living poverty, chastity, and obedience is not a prerequisite, but the fruit of this. In order to follow a path, we have to be attracted. Moral judgments and discipline on their own merely condemn, but a judgment communicated through love helps a person to take a step, to live. And love is seeing another person who fully lives out certain values. Love is, above all, offering a companionship. The Good



Shepherd guides His sheep by staying and walking with them, and so shows them the right way to go. Often, we try to point the way to others as if showing them a map, without walking with them; we're not willing to welcome and embrace them, to get our hands dirty alongside them.

Is today's Church offering a shared path for men and women?

I think that the current situation of the Church has brought us to a good place. Today, no one listens to or follows a judgment or precept for its own sake. Today's men and women say: if you don't love me, your laws mean nothing to me. There is no longer an *a priori* trust in the Church inside of which a proposal can be "verified." Before, for better or for worse, people put their trust in the Church. Today, we have to re-create this place of trust, inside which we can propose a judgment that better corresponds with our happi-

ness. And this space can be created by a companionship made for man, without which there is no soil to sow this judgment. I'm amazed by the way Pope Francis creates this place of trust. All the people I meet, even the most unlikely individuals and those who aren't believers or who come from different cultures and faiths, show a great trust in him. I find it incredible. I see this trust he evokes in others as a call to a great responsibility; it asks something of me. God is offering us this time of grace, and we have to help the Pope to love men and women within this trust that the Holy Spirit is creating in our midst.

What does it mean to help and to follow the Pope? Maybe many things about him strike us, but it's easy to stop short with what "corresponds" to our preferences, or think we've already understood everything.

We don't know how to follow Christ. We need the Church to teach us this. And we follow the Pope precisely because, through him, Christ himself tells us how He wants to be followed. In this way, He calls us to conversion. Every pontiff shepherds the flock within time, within the stretch of history in which God places him, but each of them points us to Christ. This is the source of our certainty, which makes trying to compare them a useless exercise. In the Popes of my lifetime, the love for Christ has been evident; each has lived his ministry closely following Christ, preferring Christ. The Lord asks the Pope at a personal level, "First, you follow me," so that we too can follow Him. Why does John, the disciple Jesus loved, let Peter enter the tomb before Him? Because he senses that in order to see and believe, he needs to follow Peter—to follow Christ by following Peter, who was the first to follow Him.

What is most important in the time after the Holy Year?

After the debtor has all of his debts forgiven, he still refuses to forgive the first brother he sees even the tiny debt that he is owed. He'd already forgotten what happened. This is the real issue: the passage from an understanding we've received everything to the mercy that is asked of us for others and there is an immense disproportion in the measure of these two, but even seconds after we are forgiven everything, without measure, we're capable of going back to making calculations. I'm referring first of all to our encounters with family, friends, our community, those closest to us. Right away, at the first run-in, we've become tyrants. We've already forgotten. This is what's important after the Holy Year: not to forget. This is the deep awareness that's asked of us, which pushes us to always continue to ask for mercy. **T**

ONLY FOR LIVING

As the work on **SCHOOL OF COMMUNITY** resumes together with Fr. Julián Garrón by live connection with the rest of the world, we offer a little tour of some of the many groups who read a text and reflect on life in such a variety of locations as a café in Italy, a bishopric in France, and a parking lot in Nigeria.

BY A. LEONARDI, P. PEREGO, A. STOPPA

ITALY

The Rasty Bar company

It was not something they planned. “Actually, we never would have done it.” But Angelo and Matteo got married. They had been living together for 10 years and had a son. Then they met Francesco and his wife Federica, a couple who lived not far from them. “From the very beginning we noticed the way they lived. They were truly happy to educate their children, to be a family, to face the difficulties of each day: something big made them different,” recounts Angela. “We were falling in

love with their life, while we were no longer enough for each other.”

The story of the companionship of the Rasty Bar, a little gathering place on the outskirts of Fidenza, began with them. Angela and Matteo were regular customers. Francesco began stopping by every evening after work to have a drink with Matteo. Friday evening happy hour with their wives became a regular appointment, in the midst of older men who played endless card games, drank, and made a lot of noise, and younger men who never raised their eyes from the slot machines. The two couples talk-

ed about how their week had been, what was going on in their lives and at work, their discoveries, the things that did not make sense. “So without thinking about it, we found ourselves doing School of Community.”

Now, two years later, about 30 people get together every Friday evening at 7 p.m. “New and old friends join in, and they keep us alert and on our toes,” says Francesco. “This always reminds me that I am loved and have done nothing to deserve it.” Their past lives, their ages and their characters differ “a lot,” they emphasize, and this is a difference that they >>

Quei pescatori della Galilea avevano in proprietà di una flottiglia di pescherecci. Avevano chiamato *koinonoi*, *comunicanti*, in una comunione di beni, diremmo noi. Quel gruppo di cristiani, che si trovava sotto il portico di Salomone, perché la stessa parola per indicare la comunità? I cristiani avevano coscienza di possedere in comune un'unica ragione della vita – cioè Gesù Cristo.

La comunione dei cristiani primitivi è descritta da Giovanni nella sua Prima Lettera: «Quello che abbiamo visto e udito, noi lo annunziamo anche a voi, perché anche voi siate in comunione con noi. La nostra comunione è col Padre e col Figlio. Se diciamo che siamo in comunione con loro e non camminiamo nelle tenebre, mentiamo e non in pratica la verità. Ma se camminiamo come egli è nella luce, siamo in comunione con gli altri».⁷²

La comunione, quindi, dei primi discepoli di Cristo che è stato loro annunciato come la verità del cammino e del destino dell'uomo: l'uomo entra così in comunione con la presenza di Dio intervenendo in un intervento che cambia l'essere e la vita. La presenza liberamente coinvolto in questo gli uomini chiamati sono in comunione con gli altri, si possiedono gli uni perché possiedono Cristo, la vita in Lui.

La parola *koinonia* indica una realtà esistente, Cristo, che è riconosciuta dagli uomini che la riconoscono da ogni altro aspetto un valore che implica qualcosa che interviene nell'uomo, che diventa creatura.



⁷² 1 Gv 1,3.6-7.

» love, one that illuminates something else among them.

There are those who are 20, like Leonardo, and those who are more than twice that age, like Fabio. Originally from Trentino, Fabio has long called Emilia Romagna his home. For years he set aside the Movement. “It asked me to be true, and I didn’t care to change,” he says without excuses. “Up to the age of 50 I continued to work, to have a wife and son, but I avoided loving and showing my need for love.” And yet, over time, because of the enthusiasm of his wife, who was involved with the GS teens, he felt the need to break free from the way things were in his life, centered only on himself. “Also my work at the firm was made up of problems, not people.” So he began to throw himself into relationships, into things, “but my logic always sought to have the upper hand, to be more important than my heart, and so I never truly entered into relationship with the other. The more effort I put in, the less the bonds grew.” There was a question he could not grasp with his head: “What is the difference between what I do and what *happens*?”

The answer came with the companionship of the Rasty Bar friends. “I saw something happen that I did not determine myself;” a friendship and an intensity that were incalculable. “So you have to ask yourself why. What’s happening here? It doesn’t depend on the things I say or my efforts. It’s the presence of Christ, this alone, that attracts us.” The more people are serious about their own lives, the more unity they experience as a group. “The School of Community is profoundly personal. It goes

on continuously, not just during that hour,” he says. “Actually, above all outside that hour.”

THE PHONE CALL. During their gathering, their kids played in the café. The first time Valentina came, she brought six-year-old Gioele with her. As they returned home, she said, “Mommy, these are my friends and I want to be with them.” Valentina is a nurse, and became involved in the group through Carla, whom she has known for ages. That evening she remained silent the whole time, but at the end she managed to say, “I had been waiting for Carla’s phone call for 20 years.”

Then there is Antonella. When she was an architecture student, she passed every day in front of the stands staffed by CLU students. “I still remember their faces after 15 years.” She paid

no attention to what they were proposing because she was not interested, but she enjoyed interacting with them. “I challenged them. They were always so united and serene. I wanted to see if they were still as happy as the day before. I said to myself, ‘Don’t they have their own problems, their own sadness?!’” Today she is here at the Rasty Bar. A year ago her sister invited her to the prayer vigil for the victims of the Paris terrorist attacks. “Outside the church I saw them again, with those same gazes.” From that day on, she has never missed a gathering.

On Friday evening Sara may arrive tired or with little desire, but she says she leaves School of Community with questions she mulls over all the next week. “They change my way of looking at everything I live.” The things they read or recount “are alarms that ring during the

“What’s happening here? It doesn’t depend on my efforts. It’s the presence of Christ that attracts us.”



day,” adds Chiara, who had neglected School of Community after the birth of her daughters. “Here I am forced to make a journey, to work on myself. Now if I listen to Giussani and Carrón, I pay more attention to myself, and look at what happens in my life. I see that I am increasingly interested in one thing: that this You make Himself seen.” Another girl puts her heart on the table. “I was a drug addict for years. With you, I have discovered that I needn’t have spent a dime to be happy.”

And the people in the café? “In the beginning we were in a corner, and they acted as if we weren’t even there,” says Fabio. “Then they began to leave tables free for us, to pay attention to us. The more curious among them watch and listen. They all know what we do and our gathering always begins with a prayer.” In the meantime the management of the place has changed, and the story continues. “In one of the places you would least expect, a café,” says Angela. “But I can say that in that café the Lord has changed my life.”



ITALY. School of Community at the Rasty Bar in Fidenza.

FRANCE

A lightning strike

In Dijon, in central France, amidst vineyards and abbeys, School of Community was unknown until two years ago, when Olivier, an economics professor, happened upon the figure of Fr. Luigi Giussani. “It was in June of 2014 and I was preparing a course in business ethics. As I was doing research online on figures related to Italian Catholicism, I discovered the existence of this priest and the movement of CL.” He set aside the course preparation and spent the whole day reading everything he could find in French. It was a real *coup de foudre*. In the following days he wrote the secretary of the community to ask for information. “For me it was like throwing a message in a bottle into the great sea of the internet. Instead, I received an answer from Isabel and Silvio in Paris, who advised me to start with a few texts, *The Risk of Education* and the three volumes of the PerCorso.” Perhaps School of Community

began then, in the exchange of text messages between Olivier and Silvio, who messaged back and forth all that summer with questions and reflections.

A few months later, the two met in Paris at an Indian restaurant. “In an instant, I saw what I had been reading in the books,” recounts Olivier. I understood that a friendship like this was something I could not do without.” As he got on the train heading back to Dijon, he felt a sense of longing. “He had told me about this moment called School of Community, but Lyon and Paris were too far to reach. I wrote him right away, asking for some help, and he said, “Why don’t you start one in Dijon?”

Shortly before Christmas, Olivier sent an email to about 10 friends and colleagues, attaching the text of Fr. Julian Carron’s talk at the Beginning Day. “If you’re interested, I’d like to tell you about something I discovered a few months ago.” Five people showed up. They watched the video on the Move-

ment, *The Beautiful Road*. Olivier talked about Fr. Giussani and his new friends in Paris, and proposed meeting regularly to read one of his books together. Of the five who came, three were actually interested: Philippe, Pierre, and Eric. From then on, every Friday evening they met in a room that the bishop of the city made available to them.

WITHIN A JOURNEY. “Olivier piqued my curiosity,” recounts 42-year-old Philippe. “But above all, there was a line that he read that stuck in my mind: “I am nothing when you are not present.” “I returned because I wanted to understand what those words were saying to me.” In that period Philippe was in the middle of a separation from his wife after 20 years of marriage. He was facing a period of great suffering for himself and his four children, the youngest of whom was only a year old. “The School of Community did not entail any precise kind of help from the others, but I began to feel better. It was strange: I started wanting to live again, even if these friends did nothing in particular for me. They simply were there. I felt that something was growing in me: I was starting to love myself again, through the eyes of Fr. Giussani.”

His companions on the journey, Pierre and Eric, soon to be joined by Sarah, were also going through difficult times. “None of us had our life together. Between us, we had experienced being fired, being unemployed, affective solitude, and problems with children. We were a School of Community of unfortunate people, but we no longer felt like victims. Finally we were part of a journey.”

All of 2015 was marked by faithfulness to that gesture. Some of them were able to participate in >>



FRANCE. Philippe during the games at last summer's vacation.

» the Spiritual Exercises and the summer vacation. At the end of the year, when Olivier was transferred and left Burgundy, none of them considered stopping School of Community. "I took on the responsibility for following the group, which in the meantime was joined by Catherine," recounts Phillippe. "I said 'yes' even if I'm not capable and notwithstanding my problematic family life, because School of Community is the one way I have to hold together all the pieces of myself, something impossible by our own efforts."

Today the small group has enlarged to include Sabine and Régis. Silvio travels from Paris to see them whenever possible. "We read the passage from the Spiritual Exercises where Giussani talks about Peter's "yes." Those few lines prompted 70-year-old Régis, whose business had failed and who had suffered five heart attacks in the last year, to say, "Jesus speaks this way to us too, to our down-at-the-heel lives."

NIGERIA **Nyemike's notebook**

Early on a Sunday afternoon, 32-year-old Godfrey is standing in a corner of the parking lot of the clinic in the Muslim district of Idi Araba, in Lagos, Nigeria, with a book in hand. It is 110 degrees outside, and the city is loud with the noise of traffic and the calls to prayer from the minarets. He is there with Steve, three years his junior, who has two children and a good job in a big company, but is tied down with shifts and strange hours seven days a week. They have carved out this little space of time to do School of Community. If they cannot make it at this time, they re-organize to meet at a bar for School of Community and a beer. Steve had asked his friend to get together in this way because he could no longer go to School of Community at the "official" time. "I just die without School of Community. Here I recover myself," Steve had said, full of emotion, at an assembly.

"The Movement in Nigeria began in the late 1980s. We are a small community, today just over 50 people, university students, young workers, and a few "oldies" in a city of more than 20 million inhabitants," recounts Barbara, an Italian *Memor Domini* who has been in Lagos for over 10 years and leads the CL community. "About three years ago our friend Rose came from Uganda to have an assembly with us. Everyone was struck by how she spoke of School of Community, how important it is for living." The effect was that little groups started forming, like Steve and Godfrey's, but also among university students, for example, or among 15 people working at an NGO called Loving Gaze.

"The next year, I also began a new group with some people," continues Barbara. "I had gone to the CL International Assembly in Italy with Roland, a young worker. He was a bit 'down,' and speaking with Rose, she told me, 'Do School of Community with him, and you'll see that he will feel better.'" When they returned to Lagos, the little group began, with the addition of Charles and David, 28 and 29 years old. "I realized right away that what started as a help for Roland, who for that matter was feeling better, began to be vital for me. We had a foreman, a real estate agent, and a director of purchasing for a company, and they asked concrete questions concerning the details of what they were living every day, putting to the test everything we were reading."

A close group. "Yes, but this is not enough. The heart is another thing," explains Barbara. "Over time the group changed. Roland was transferred to Abuja and Charles also was at risk of being sent elsewhere. But I needed to continue that experience, so I asked Godfrey to come, and then Ruben, a friend who had »



A NEW CHAPTER IN LIFE

When Agnes was sixteen years old, she just hoped for an early death. But then the School of Community changed her life, and that of her family.

I hate life. I hope I die young. What sense is there in being born?" These were the thoughts of a girl in her home of mud walls and sheet metal in Kireka, a slum on the periphery of Kampala, Uganda. These were her same thoughts on the morning of February 26, 2014, the first time she entered the Luigi Giussani High School.

Agnes started from this point to tell the story of her seventeen years, marked in August. "I've grown up always hearing that a father is the strength of a family, but for years I always experienced the opposite." Agnes's father drank heavily. He had studied and even taught in the past, but then he started drinking. "He was often drunk, and told us that we had no future, and then he insulted us, me, my sister, and my four brothers."

Everything fell to her mother, one of the women of the Meeting Point, the association that gathers women in the area who suffer from AIDS, founded by the nurse Rose Busingye. "At home we made necklaces, and then we sold them." That was the family's sole source of income for the needs of all. "It seemed too much, even for my

mother, and I was afraid that sooner or later she would leave. Instead she stayed there, forgiving and loving."

In the meantime Agnes went to school, in the midst of numerous difficulties. "My mother begged me to stay close to those who did School of Community together." It was what sustained her, and it would be a help for her daughter as well. "I wasn't interested. I preferred to be free to do what I wanted." At home nothing changed. Rather, it became increasingly difficult. When the situation was tense her brothers left. "Except for Charles. In the evenings I often cried desperately. He didn't. He was calm, and had a certainty in his eyes..." Charles had been participating in School of Community for some time. "I wanted that serenity of his."

It was a Monday in the second week of the second trimester. "I walked into that meeting room and everything seemed strange, the songs, what they read, what they talked about." It lasted two and a half hours. And yet Agnes noticed that they were all happy. "For me, they were theories. 'God

loves you. You have value'... But then why did I have such a father? Why did I hate myself?"

She returned home, but the questions did not stop. Agnes returned to the next meeting, and the one after that. "I began to feel at home. One day we were reading *Why the Church?* My mother had given me a copy as a gift." It talked about the person who distances herself from God. "It was me! I hated Him. I wished I could see Him and throw my heart at Him." How could she forgive her father? "Rose answered, 'Your father has a value. God gave him to you, for a "something more." Maybe your father is exactly the point of departure for discovering this.'"

Agnes returned home, but this time with a new hypothesis. "I looked at him, and realized that I loved him," exactly as she was discovering that she loved herself. Could all this be for him, too? Could it change his life? "I began reading him School of Community every day at home. The Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim...* And then we would talk about what we'd read." Four days went by this way, but then on Friday she returned home from school to find him drunk again. But he was not the same as before. "He railed against me, telling me that I was wasting my time with him. How could I really think that 'all circumstances are steps to lead us to the mystery'?" He used exactly those words, in his drunken state, and he understood when he was sober. Agnes did not stop, even under the violence of his insults.

In early September, five months had passed since his last drink. "At the age of 48, he has changed. He seems happy. Our family is happy." He decided to meet Rose. "She welcomed him like a mother, and I've never seen my father smile so much. They spoke at length, and I watched them." After the meeting the two headed home, with her father recounting nonstop what Rose had said. "Did you hear? She called me prodigal son. That's what I am. And I know that this is the beginning of a new chapter in my life." Life has not changed—"The difficulties remain, even about what there is to eat tomorrow. But we are happy. I'm happy."

Paolo Perego



NIGERIA. Some young people and adults of the Lagos community.

» been transferred to Port Harcourt and had returned to Lagos.”

“School of Community enables me to breathe freely,” says Godfrey. This is especially the case now, during difficult times for Nigeria, with serious economic troubles linked to the plunge of oil prices, the uncertainty about employment, and the activity of Boko Haram. People are leaving. There is a widespread mentality that measures your value in terms of the success you achieve. Godfrey was about to get married. Everything was ready, even their new home. But then he broke off the engagement. “I sensed that my fiancé was marrying me for the sake of marrying and setting up a home. I loved her, but she didn’t love me as much as do the friends of the Movement, with whom I’ve experienced what it means to be loved totally. Can I live for less than this?” Nyemike also has difficulties. His employers have not paid him for months. At School of Community they have spoken a lot about mercy, so he began keeping a notebook and writing down “every moment in which Jesus is at work, when I see His mercy in action,

when I see He loves me.” He tells his friends about the daily notes. The first day there were two notes, the second day three, then there was a day without notes, because there is also our human nature, and distraction. “But what He does wins over everything.”

EITHER THE BUS OR LUNCH. At the last gathering there was also a woman with a newborn at her breast. “Christopher’s wife. He is a farmer. They have been away for a few months in her hometown so she could be with her family for the birth,” recounts Barbara. When they returned, he wanted to start attending School of Community again as soon as possible, but when the time came, his wife said, “We can’t, because I promised we’d go see my aunt and show her the baby. Go by yourself.” “No, we’re going to School of Community, and you’re coming too, because all this, our marriage, our life, would not exist apart from it. Even the baby, in the end, would be just another mouth to feed and the cause of a thousand worries. Instead, there, we can experience him as a gift.”

Some people travel more than two

hours on the beat-up public transport buses to go to the assemblies. “We also did the jubilee pilgrimage. I thought that we could organize a bus, but there was the cost, and so the 17 CLU students who went had hardly enough money for lunch. They bought a baguette and shared it,” recounts Barbara. “You watch them grow, but this happens only in front of something that can truly change life. For this reason the other day at the gathering of university students, I told them about what has changed my life.”

Barbara noted a new student, Tony. “He had a dark expression, and his gaze seemed lost. ‘What do I have that I can communicate to him?’ I asked myself.” In front of the students, Barbara recounted the story of her encounter, the time she heard Fr. Giussani speak, and the words that she kept in her heart: “That you may be happy!” “I wanted this for him,” she says. A few days later she got a call from Abraham, the leader of the university students. “I spoke with Tony. He says he’d like to come to the assembly of the Fraternity. Add his name to the list: Tony Abdullah... Ah, he’s Muslim.” **T**

Cardinal-designate Dieudonné Nzapalainga, age 49, in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic.

IN THE HEART OF A TRIAL

“I wasn’t called for my own sake.” DIEUDONNÉ NZAPALAINGA, the youngest of the new cardinals, talks about his life in the Central African Republic. His vocation, the war, the imam who lived at his house... the path of forgiveness. And why he is not afraid.

BY MAURIZIO VITALI

On Saturday, November 19th, the vigil of the concluding day of the Year of Mercy, the pope will hold a consistory nominating 17 new cardinals. They come from 11 countries, representing almost every continent. This, the Holy Father has said, “expresses the universality of the Church which proclaims and witnesses to the Good News of God’s Mercy in every corner of the earth.” From the Apostolic Nuncio to Syria to the heroic, elderly priest in Albania, from the prelates from the U.S. to pastors of poor and troubled countries, if there’s anything they have in common it’s a missionary witness in their respective existential peripheries.

The oldest among them are almost ninety years old: the scarlet denotes a witness, not a strategy for the future. The youngest is a “lion” from Africa at 49 years of age. His name is Dieudonné Nzapalainga and he is the archbishop of Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic. Francis inaugurated the Holy Year when he opened the Holy Door of their cathedral a year ago. A real lion; it’s not just a play on words. To give an idea of his solidity as a man and in the faith: last year in the midst of the brutal civil war, which to make matters worse seems to be

(but isn’t) a religious war, he visited the most dangerous neighborhoods where only soldiers and rebels dare to go. They go in fully armed; he went with neither a bulletproof vest nor escort, to meet the poor, the children, refugees, widows, and the sick. He asked Christians, Muslims, and animists to stop hating each other. He pointed to forgiveness as the only path to the dignity of the person and reconciliation for the country.



Dieudonné Nzapalainga.

Your Eminence, what was your first reaction to the news that Pope >>

» **Francis nominated you as a cardinal in the Holy Roman Church?**

When the message reached me, I felt confused and almost lost. But I thought right away of the poor people of Bangui and had a clear awareness that I was not called for my own sake, but rather for my country, for the African people. I was filled with an immense gratitude to God and to the Holy Father, together with a deep sense of humility considering that, before, Francis came to the Central African Republic to visit an impoverished Church living in a very difficult situation, full of suffering and sadness; and now, again, he's calling one of the poor sons of this Church to stay close to him and to promote forgiveness and reconciliation.

You live in a very poor country. The median income is just over a dollar a day. You yourself were born into a large family with little money.

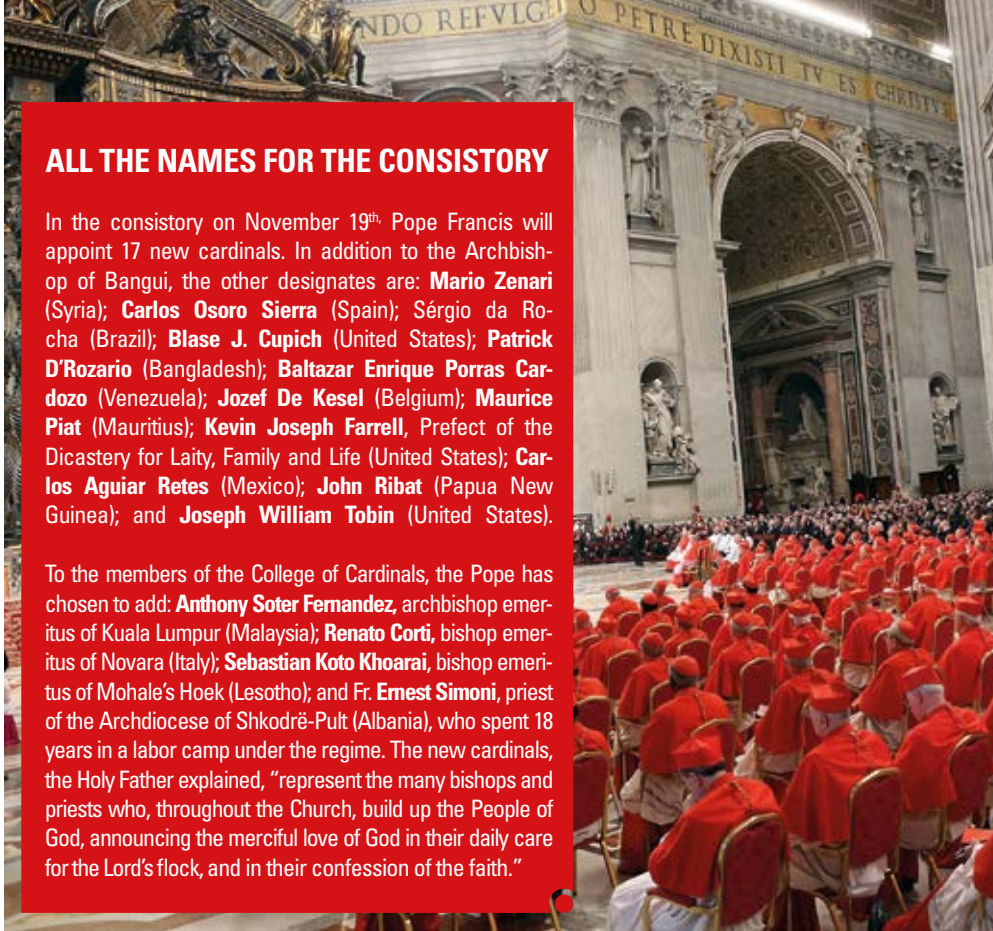
Extremely poor. There were 14 of us with brothers and sisters. My dad was Catholic; my mom Protestant.

How did you come to your vocation?

Through meeting a European Spiritan priest (*editor's note: from the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, to which the new Cardinal belongs*). He came to our neighborhood, spent time playing with us children, eating with us; basically, he shared life with us. I thought: a European who spends time with me, amazing!

Is there a real possibility of reconciliation in a country so shaken by poverty and violence?

Pope Francis came to open the Holy Door in our cathedral to open the Jubilee of Mercy, after a time of conflict and division. That day, the crowds flooded the streets of the cities, offices and businesses were closed, and everything was an explosion of joy and a festive chorus of horns honk-



ALL THE NAMES FOR THE CONSISTORY

In the consistory on November 19th, Pope Francis will appoint 17 new cardinals. In addition to the Archbishop of Bangui, the other designates are: **Mario Zenari** (Syria); **Carlos Osoro Sierra** (Spain); Sérgio da Rocha (Brazil); **Blase J. Cupich** (United States); **Patrick D'Rozario** (Bangladesh); **Baltazar Enrique Porras Cardozo** (Venezuela); **Jozef De Kesel** (Belgium); **Maurice Piat** (Mauritius); **Kevin Joseph Farrell**, Prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life (United States); **Carlos Aguiar Retes** (Mexico); **John Ribat** (Papua New Guinea); and **Joseph William Tobin** (United States).

To the members of the College of Cardinals, the Pope has chosen to add: **Anthony Soter Fernandez**, archbishop emeritus of Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia); **Renato Corti**, bishop emeritus of Novara (Italy); **Sebastian Koto Khoarai**, bishop emeritus of Mphahlele (Lesotho); and Fr. **Ernest Simoni**, priest of the Archdiocese of Shkodër-Pult (Albania), who spent 18 years in a labor camp under the regime. The new cardinals, the Holy Father explained, "represent the many bishops and priests who, throughout the Church, build up the People of God, announcing the merciful love of God in their daily care for the Lord's flock, and in their confession of the faith."

ing. I saw the faces of those people: happy, joyous, crying out: "Thanks be to God! Thanks be to God!" It's a people tormented by poverty and violence who are awaiting words of peace and happiness.

Have the Pope's visit and the Year of Mercy, in your assessment, had an impact on your situation?

The Pope's visit is a point of no return in our history. He came to us without being slowed down by the climate of violence or the chaotic and unruly situation. Francis was daring. He was daring because he's a man of faith, and he came to be with us. By doing so, he touched the hearts of everyone. People found themselves faced with a happy man, who said in all simplicity: I'm coming to you and I'm not afraid. And among these were many, many Muslims.

You say this at the level of hearts and minds. But at the social and political level?

Francis publicly witnessed, in front of everyone, that together and only together, it's possible to work toward

peace and build up our country. He gave meaning to our being Central Africans. He showed us that there is common ground where we can seek to bring the various positions together, into dialogue, and work for reconciliation as a nation.

Your Eminence, it's said that you often go around the city to meet with people from all walks of life, whatever their circumstances. Is that true?

Yes, of course.

With a security escort?

No, no... are you kidding? I go by foot, or, if it's far, by car. Sometimes I drive.

Forgive me the direct and basic question but... aren't you afraid?

(*He laughs, amused*) I've always considered martyrdom to be intrinsic to being Christian. Look, if something happened to me, I'd feel as if, on the streets of Bangui, I were going toward Jerusalem, following Jesus's road to death. Fear? No. In any case forgiveness and reconciliation are stronger than fear. Because they are attributes of Christ's being.



So, you're in the habit of visiting the notorious "Km5" neighborhood, the Muslim quarter shaken by regular bouts of violence?

I go there often to meet with my brothers and sisters to tell them that we need to come together again, to work to bring back peace, justice, and reconciliation; and this requires we make sure we can bury our battle axes and fight against extremism on both sides of the divide.

At the beginning of October, right in Km 5, there was a lot of conflict and fatalities following the assassination of an army general, Commander Marcel Mombeka. This event sent tensions skyrocketing. Can you still go back there?

Look, a few days after the assassination, on October 13th, I led a march for peace in that neighborhood.

How did it go?

With a jubilant crowd, we marched to invite others to dialogue and to an end of fear. I'll tell you two stories that especially struck me. At one point, a goat jumped in at the head of the pro-

cession and silently marched with us. It became our mascot. Even more, it was a sign that even the animals are for peace among men in Central Africa... Then, I stopped near a group of young people and spoke to them about peace and forgiveness. They went into their house and came back out to hand over to me another young man they'd been holding prisoner; without a doubt, they'd intended to execute him.

And then? Were you able to speak to everyone publicly?

Yes, without any trouble. I emphasized that we Christians, together with Muslims, sang the national anthem to show the whole world that we are Central Africans. And so I went on to say that no one can build up our country for us. That the time has come for us to love. And so I asked that all the anger in us be extinguished.

Is the conflict between the Séléka and the anti-Balaka not a deadly religious war between Muslims and Christians?

No, it's a political war. Christian and Muslim authorities have always highlighted that the Séléka are not going to battle for Mohammed and the anti-Balaka are not fighting in the name of Jesus; they're doing it for personal gain. The anti-Balaka define themselves as Christians, but in reality they aren't, and they're using God's name as a shield. A Christian doesn't kill, and Christianity teaches forgiveness.

What does living the faith in such a tortured context mean for you?

Always having faith in God, especially in the heart of a trial, and having the gift of an interior strength that makes you capable of facing even the most absurd and inhuman situations and, how do you say, overcome them. It means remembering over and over again that, on the cross, Christ said,

"Father, forgive them." And in so doing, he cast a light amid the brutal darkness of the world.

Is it true that the imam of Bangui, Oumar Kobine Layama, lives at your house?

He was there for five months. He found himself in need of a place to live that was safe and calm, because where he was living was too dangerous. So I gave him the keys to my house. We were already very good friends—we'd organized many peace-building initiatives together—and now are even better friends. Living together meant experiencing what we both believe in: that religion unites men and women; it doesn't isolate them. It sustains them in their life as a community and makes them custodians and lovers of life.

What is hope for you?

Turning your gaze to Christ. Nothing is impossible for God. But God does nothing without us, without our freedom. To defeat fear, we need only respond to the Lord's call and live in communion with him and with our brothers and sisters.

What message would you like to send to your Christian brothers and sisters in Europe? What would you ask?

Prayer. Which is the awareness that God is everything and without him, man is nothing. This is at the root of our unity as brothers and sisters.

One last thing: One year later, what does the Pope's visit mean for you and for your people?

Simply this from the First Letter of St. John: "what we've heard with our ears, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have contemplated, and touched with our hands." The Lord's presence that came to visit us, to open the Door and tell us, "Enter!" **T**

IN ORDER TO RECOVER THE MEANING OF LIVING TOGETHER

In December, Italy will vote on a referendum on a constitutional reform already approved by the Parliament. The reform would mean the end of bicameralism and a new Senate. We publish here the document written by Communion and Liberation as a judgment that can be helpful for everyone.

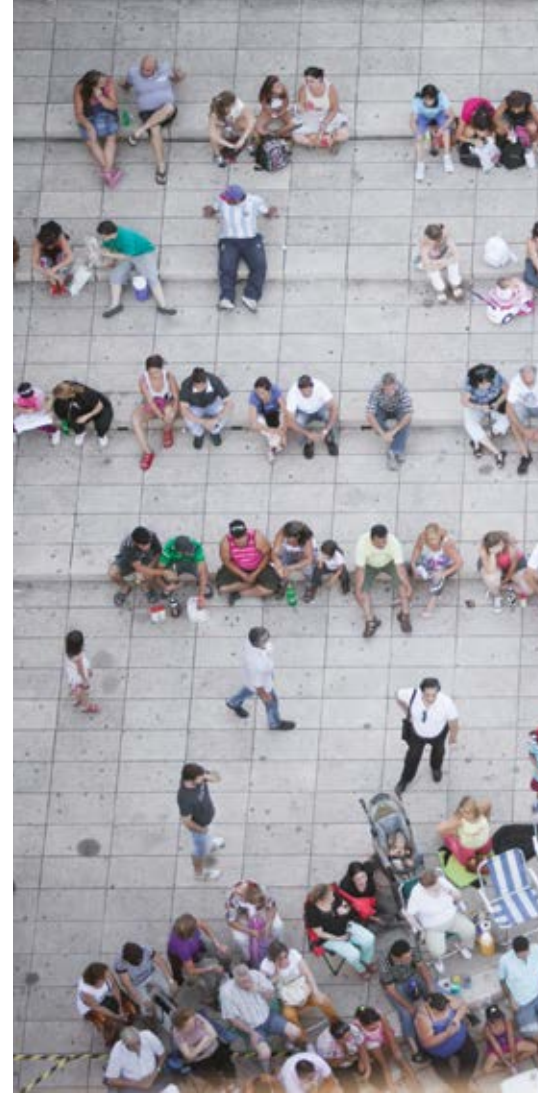
In a general climate of trouble, with significant political changes occurring and a weak economic recovery that have left many in conditions of uncertainty and suffering, and in an increasingly complicated and dramatic international situation, on December 4th we will be called upon to voice our will in a referendum on the reform of the Constitution approved by Parliament. In particular, all citizens will be asked to express their choice about ending the two-chamber Parliament in which each chamber has equal powers, and about a reformulation of the responsibilities of the national and regional governments.

1. BEYOND THE LOGIC OF DISENGAGEMENT AND ALIGNMENT

For months, the debate about the reform has been burdened by strained interpretations and efforts to exploit the moment that have strongly polarized the political parties and transformed the referendum into a test of the current government, and its Prime Minister in particular. Added to this is increasing disaffection, charged with distrust and resentment, with political participation, which in all likelihood will once again affect this important appointment at the voting booths by consolidating a tendency to abstain from voting.

In these conditions, only two antithetical positions seem possible: on the one hand, *sterile indifference* and *cynical disengagement*, and on the other, *the logic of a priori alignment* that blocks a true comparison of ideas and reasons. Both positions strike us as humanly and politically arid and unproductive, if not deleterious, for those who advance them.

Even before the judgments on the merit of the solutions adopt-



ed by the reform that is the object of this referendum (and which deserve very careful examination), no one can be unaware of the true urgent need of the moment: the need that has grown in recent years for a more stable and efficient political system that can promote better conditions of life for every citizen and the country, in light of the fundamental objective that has always existed, that is, the promotion of the common good. As Fr. Giussani observed, “The contract that regulates common life (the ‘Constitution’) must seek to provide increasingly perfect regulations that assure citizens shared living in communion and an education to it.”

2. THE NEED FOR CHANGE

The urgent need for change is acknowledged by opposing parties and positions, regardless of the evaluations that each may give on



take on the new challenges that face us [...] in a time of epochal changes. [...] not allowing our fears to get the better of us.”

Without the presence of people who are authentically open to encounter, dialogue, and collaboration with others, any reform can be reduced to a merely technical exercise or a battle for power.

3. OUR CONTRIBUTION: THE BEAUTY OF OPENING YOURSELF TO THE OTHER.

It is evident that a “yes” or a “no” on the constitutional referendum cannot magically solve any of today’s knotty problems, from the crisis of the social state to the doubts about the project of Europe, from the demographic collapse to the influx of migrants. However, we are aware that through the vote, or even before that, through the richness of life, of encounters and of deeper examination of the issues that we will promote around us, each person can make a contribution to the common good of our country. This is the challenge. Each of us is given an opportunity to rise to the occasion. Starting from the evidence that “the other is a good and not an obstacle to the fullness of our ‘I,’ in politics as well as in human and social relations” (Fr. Carrón), we desire that also this referendum become an opportunity for each of us to discover the beauty and advantages of opening up to the other in a true dialogue, without defensively closing in on ourselves before we even start, or digging into a position of blind obedience to a party line, but instead, collaborating with all those who expend themselves in the search for the best for all. The re-discovery of the “meaning of living together” is at stake now: nothing is more vital for a country that wants to continue to exist and to grow.

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the adequacy of this reform. Simple realism recognizes that the country needs to be reformed in order to keep up with a global world, a society that changes and renews itself at an increasingly rapid pace.

During the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Italian Republic, President Mattarella identified Italy’s greatest need today: “**To wholly recover the meaning of living together,**” because “today’s great challenges can be faced and overcome only by seeking and finding common policies and shared engagement.” His words are all the more urgent in a political context that has long been characterized by the delegitimization of the other, by defining oneself

of all as “against” someone or something. We need to learn from the best expressions of our history: those who wrote the 1948 Constitution were animated by the desire to imagine realistic and reasonable solutions for a common journey. Realities that differed greatly from each other were capable of a dialogue full of reciprocal respect, which enabled them to acknowledge as a shared foundation the value of the person and the freedom of expression and association.

We should keep in mind the words of the President of the Republic when he opened the Meeting of Rimini: our country “needs renewed enthusiasm, fraternity, curiosity about the other, desire for a future, courage to

REFERENDUM COSTITUZIONALE - 4 DICEMBRE 2016

Per recuperare il senso del vivere insieme

1. Una linea guida trasversale, con diversi orientamenti politici in tema, con un punto comune di fondo, che ha come primo e condiviso di incontro e di fine una chiamata all'unità nazionale e un patto di collaborazione e di solidarietà tra i cittadini e il Parlamento. In particolare, i vari orientamenti politici si sono mossi in tre direzioni principali: nella difesa della democrazia, nella promozione della partecipazione politica, nella difesa della libertà e della dignità della persona.

2. Oltre la logica del dimpegno e quella dello schieramento.

Il dibattito sulla riforma è da mesi apparso in forma di scontro e di contrapposizione, che ha fatto perdere di vista il senso comune e il senso di appartenenza a una comunità politica e a un progetto di futuro comune. È importante che il dibattito si riapra, che si apra un dialogo tra i cittadini e il Parlamento, che si apra un dialogo tra i cittadini e il Parlamento, che si apra un dialogo tra i cittadini e il Parlamento.

3. La necessità del cambiamento.

L'Europa è un continente in continua trasformazione, con nuove sfide e nuove opportunità. È necessario che il nostro paese si apra a un dialogo con il resto del mondo e che si apra un dialogo tra i cittadini e il Parlamento, che si apra un dialogo tra i cittadini e il Parlamento, che si apra un dialogo tra i cittadini e il Parlamento.

The document written for the upcoming referendum in Italy.



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