

**Notes on the Announcement of School of Community
with Davide Prospero and Monsignor Filippo Santoro
in video conference, March 23, 2022**

Text: L. Giussani, To Give One's Life for the Work of Another, McGill-Queen's UP, Montreal 2022, pp. 14-39.

Davide Prospero

Good evening! Before presenting the part of the text of School of Community that we will have to deal with in the coming weeks, we would like to briefly review the outcome of the journey so far and the questions you have raised. We have received a great deal of documentation on the work we have done, both personally and in groups: some in the form of testimonies, others in the form of comments, and still others—most of them—in the form of precise, heartfelt questions, a sign of the seriousness of the comparison that has taken place and the richness of the reflection that has been carried out. The proposal addressed to us did not leave us indifferent. In fact, beyond the specific contents, one factor emerges clearly from those who wrote the email: they allowed themselves to be personally touched and set in motion by this text by Giussani, by this beginning of School of Community. The many questions attest to a desire to identify with Father Giussani's experience, not to "let things slide" when one does not understand something, to compare the proposal with oneself. In short, a desire to not waste time and undertake this journey.

I will summarize the most recurrent questions, in their simplest formulation:

1. "God is All in All"

How do I discover that "God is all in all," where do I see it, what path needs to be taken to become aware of it?

Secondly, how does the awareness that "God is all in all" affect life? For example, one person wrote: "In the face of the immense evil of war that we see and that looms over us, how does recognizing this, pausing to discover in the folds of our day that God is all in all affect us?"

Similarly: "What impact does starting from ontology, as has been suggested to us, have on existence? What does ontology as a starting point mean for life?"

2. Pantheism

While there seems to be more clarity on nihilism, the topic of pantheism has prompted many questions, in various ways.

The text says: "Nihilism and pantheism destroy this I that defines the dignity of man, degrading it to the animal aspect" (p. 9). How can we grasp the traits of our yielding to the position indicated as "pantheism"? How does it manifest itself? It seems almost that it is not such a bad thing to be an indistinct part of God.

Alternatively: the concept that "God is everything" can be easily grasped. But when one affirms, in a passive manner, that "everything is God", doesn't one risk falling into the trap of pantheism? What does "everything is God" mean?

3. Asking for Being and Extraneousness

What does it mean "entreaty to be"? "Usually," writes one person, "prayer for me is a request for help and not an entreaty to be. What am I missing?"

Giussani writes: "Instead of God's familiarity that walks with Adam and Eve in the cool of the evening, we have the *choice of extraneousness*. Adam and Eve, rather than walking with God in the cool of the day, followed a stranger, something extraneous to their very experience" (p. 13). The question is: "why does man give into the choice of extraneousness?". And again, "how do we combat this extraneousness in our own experience?"

I would like to thank Monsignor Filippo Santoro, who will help us in our work this evening as well, first and foremost by responding to these questions and then by introducing us to the next part of the text *To Give One's Life for the Work of Another*, which will be the focus of our work in the coming weeks until the Exercises of the Fraternity.

Filippo Santoro

Thank you, Davide. I would begin with a *Glory Be* to the Holy Spirit, to the Holy Trinity, so that we may be enlightened on the journey of this School of Community. Let's recite it together.

Glory Be
Veni Sancte Spiritus

Introduction (reprise of the first lesson)

A cordial greeting to all.

As Davide said, this evening's meeting is composed of two parts: I will first respond to the questions that have been posed, and then I will introduce the new School of Community text, "Christ is all and in all."

Firstly, my compliments go to the two opening songs and particularly for the well-sung one by Amália Rodrigues, *Foi Deus*, because this *fado* expresses how "God is all in all" very well.

Before responding to the questions, I would like to highlight the right attitude we need to take on in order to introduce ourselves to an understanding of Fr. Giussani's text. This attitude was suggested to me by a preparatory discussion we had, during which I emphasized the need to understand what was driving Giussani when he made that speech in 1997. In order to clarify this attitude, I would like to begin with a document that was provided to me by Alberto Savorana, which can be found in Fr. Giussani's biography, in Chapter 32, entitled "Old age has erupted in me" (pp. 965-967 and pp. 975-978).

Alberto writes:

"Giussani would look back on June of 1996 as a key moment in his life. He spoke about it at length a year later, in a talk to the Benedictine monks of the Cascinazza Monastery. He had made a discovery, he told them, "Old age has erupted in me". [...] He added, "The Lord suddenly gave me to understand, and [...] caused the sudden eruption inside of me of an awareness of the age that was passing [...] at seventy-four years old, precisely." [...] he had reached the point where he had had to surrender to the facts. Giussani could put a date on his surrender: "This awareness awoke [in me] one day in June last year [1996]." It was a time when Giussani suddenly found that he was forced to accept help in order to meet his basic daily needs. [...] [He thinks] "well look here. This is some ending! The person ends in nothing." This thought, he said, was tied to the fact that "nihilism is the temptation that most brutally underlies the whole mentality of today." Giussani had been listening to Beethoven a few moments before, and the thought occurred to him that even "Beethoven, who wrote the Ninth Symphony, ends up like this. Dante and his *Divine Comedy*... They all end like this." But even as he thought this, he feels a surge of rebellion welling up inside him: "It's impossible," he thought, and he wondered immediately if there was anything that could free us from such nothingness. "And suddenly there rose up before me, with a clarity that was like touching my mother's face: the self. The self! When I say 'I,' I'm not that," not nothing. Giussani told this story in different words on other occasions: "*Corpus quod corrumpitur aggravat animam*, the Bible says: the body that decays oppresses, weighs on the spirit. For myself above all I said, 'It's impossible that I end up like this! What is there besides this corruptible physicality? Deep down, what is this, my (my!) reality? [...].' It's the *self*." That week in June, which he had spent undergoing medical tests, was full of discoveries for Giussani. For a long time leading up to it, as well, he had been experiencing a rich and fruitful period of reflection. "In these last three or four years, God has filled me with a greater swarm of thoughts and intuitions than ever before in my whole history, the whole history I've had." These intuitions paved the way to find an answer to the questions that came to him that June: "The next day, after I had spent all night thinking about these things, I suddenly understood why Saint Paul says that 'God is all in all.' If Beethoven, Dante, and I all end up as dust," and if, on the other hand, God was everything in everything "so totally, then who am I; my mother—who is she?" Giussani thought: "Either an appearance, that is, nothing, like Anchises [a

shadow] in the arms of Aeneas, or else part of the whole. Nihilism and pantheism are the two extremes of human thought. Either part of the whole, or else nothing.” Giussani told the monks, “I had never consciously followed that line of reasoning before. I came to it in June last year.” Everything appeared to unfold as though, through the limitations brought on by age, the Lord was having Giussani experience a virtue that he never tired of practicing: obedience, in the style of Jesus. *Christus, factus oboediens usque ad mortem*, Christ made obedient unto death, accepting the cross, “demonstrated his truth. ‘God is all in all,’ but ‘Christ is everything in everyone.’ What does that mean? That Christ is the man from whom we understand who man is and who God is.”

The text continues:

“Those exercises [which took place in 1997] were one of the highest points of Giussani’s thought, a radical, hand-to-hand struggle with the questions that had always been and would always be a part of human thought, philosophical or otherwise. Giussani was not afraid to think and did not draw back from the questions raised by human experience, whether his own or other people’s, and the two lessons were an audacious example of this. He would later call them his most “pensive” exercises (he referred to them this way on 15th November 1998, when he spoke to a group of novices of the *Memores Domini*: ‘Reread the fraternity exercises from last year, because I believe they are the most advanced expression of our way of understanding life, our way of feeling’). Nihilism and pantheism were two permanent tangents of human thought that attempted to answer the question of the origin and substance of things in general, and in particular the reality of the self. Giussani considered them to be opposite sides of the same surrender, in which reason, unable to address the problem of existence, either denies or dissolves what it ought to explain. For the thousands of people at the Exercises it was an exceptional testament to see Giussani facing the same questions that everyone cannot help but feel to be crucial, questions rendered urgent by his physical situation, with such unprecedented, vertiginous depth, instead of succumbing to the temptation to reduce them or block them out entirely.” (A. Savorana, *The Life of Luigi Giussani*, McGill-Queen’s UP, Montreal 2018).

Therefore, more than an analytical understanding of the individual passages, the point is the impact with an event, being in the position Fr Giussani placed himself in front of these problems. Fr. Giussani’s powerful attitude towards life, with its two great temptations—nihilism and pantheism—became clearer to me thanks to a message I received from a Spanish friend, in which she writes: “This is Giussani’s method. At that moment, marked by old age, by the weight of illness, by the physical limitations that confronted him daily with the thought of things that pass, decline and end, what does this man do? Does he begin to complain? To curse God? Does he despair? No. Instead of going inwards, despairing or suffering the circumstances, he reacts with a movement of revival, overcoming appearances and committing himself and his own intelligence to the search for truth, which he knows already but rediscovers in its inner depth. The two 1997 lessons testify to a man’s self-awareness in the face of the great Presence. He was distraught; he feared that his difficulty with diction would make comprehending his speech problematic. So what does he do? He decided to record the lessons and prepare them with more care because he had a great yearning to continue the journey with his friends passionately—bestowing an act of love towards us—, even with ‘those I know little or not at all, but with whom I feel deeply united.’ While he was making those lunges, Father Giussani had each one of us in mind, he wanted to snatch us from the temptation of nihilism and pantheism, from the dissolution of the ‘I.’ What were his concerns? They weren’t: ‘When will I die, if I no longer walk and can no longer speak?’ His concerns were twofold: what is God to man and how do we come to know Him? Even though his physical conditions were painful and terrible, his passion for the Christian fact enabled him to overcome it all for us. If everything fades away, what is the point of living? The point is clear, the question is that there is One who invited us and created us, ‘Do you want to exist?’ And then He said, ‘Will you help me?’ just as Father Giussani said to you, Father

Filippo, ‘Would you willingly go to Brazil?’ And you recounted the impact it had on you to see those 52 young people surrendering their entire lives to Christ.”

This certainty must always be cultivated, and we do this through the School of Community.

So, there is an issue to be taken into consideration while deepening the content of the School of Community: I insist, rather than grasping all the passages analytically, it is about feeling the impact of being. What happens to the being that is me? Is it reduced to nothing? Does it dissolve into the whole (which is another way for ending up in nothingness), so I am no longer there?

Let us now turn to answering the most recurring questions reported by Davide.

1. “God is All in All”

How do we become aware of the fact that God is all in all? We have told ourselves many times: this emerges from our experience. We do not make ourselves, the most beautiful things in life, the decisive encounters are given to us as a gift. We cannot add a single day to our existence, the person we love can be taken away from us in an instant. In short, every day, in different ways and with varying intensity, experience tells us that life is a gift of Another, reality is a gift of Another. We experience this both when the Mystery encounters us in the form of a good, and also when it seems to hide its face, as experienced when we lost loved ones to Covid. But where would our loved ones be if in the beginning that Being had not created them and made them forever? He made them forever! So it is experience—even when dramatic and painful—which reveals to us the positive origin of our life, the consistency of our being.

In the face of the tragedy of the war before us, two things that we said in the lesson emerge with ferocious clarity.

- First of all, the mystery of man’s freedom, which can reject the “God all in all”; sin is the negation of “God all in all”, it is like taking the place of God, it is the mystery of man’s freedom being capable of rejecting God all in all.

- Secondly, the mystery of the fact that God nevertheless allows this evil, because he does replace man’s freedom with Himself. Here the words of Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 38, come to our aid: “Often we cannot understand why God refrains from intervening. Yet he does not prevent us from crying out, like Jesus on the Cross: ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ (Mt 27:46). We should continue asking this question in prayerful dialogue before his face: ‘Lord, holy and true, how long will it be?’ (Rev 6:10). It is Saint Augustine who gives us faith’s answer to our sufferings: [...]—‘if you understand him, he is not God.’ Our protest is not meant to challenge God, or to suggest that error, weakness or indifference can be found in him. Even in their bewilderment and failure to understand the world around them, Christians continue to believe in the ‘goodness and loving kindness of God’ (Tit 3:4),” which is manifested, which has entered into our history and has become close to each one of us. But can you see how many contradictions there are? The disaster of the war and Europe’s attempt to take in and welcome refugees, like the assistance that some of us are giving to our friend who came by bus from Ukraine with her children after 50 hours of travel. There is a heart that beats, a vibrating heart!

Having this judgement as a starting point, on the one hand, does not deny the abyss of the mystery in which we are immersed; on the other hand, it makes us experience that within this abyss a humility, a strength of acceptance, a strength of judgment on things, an impetus of charity and welcome are born.

Here, then, is the answer to the question regarding the impact that having ontology as a starting point has on existence. It pushes us to ask for being. This is the entreaty with which we will participate in the great gesture of the Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Russia and Ukraine, on March 25th, with Pope Francis, a gesture that places a moment of entreating and prayer for peace at the origin of our judgment.

It is ontology as a starting point that impels us to welcome the Ukrainians (as so many of our families are doing; even here in Taranto I welcomed ten ladies with their children in the diocese’s night center; and then there are many others who have opened their hearts by hosting), to welcome our children,

husbands, wives, neighbors or colleagues who ask us for forgiveness. But who will make us capable of this if not the Holy Spirit, and how can He help us if we are alienated from ourselves because “everything conspires to silence us” and our days are determined by what happens and, ultimately, by power? We are distracted by not paying attention to ontology, to the constitution of our being; we are distracted, distracted! Therefore, starting from ontology puts us back in the right position.

In the morning, let’s start the day with the *Angelus*: remember that the Word is made flesh, in other words, ontology enters history, our lives; fix your attention for a moment on the You in front of whom you are, on the You who comes to meet us with light. This instant, then, “works the soil of the day”—according to a mysterious grace—and can make forgiveness, a rebound, perhaps the courage of an unexpected response, or of silence, easier. Let us start the day with ontology, placing ourselves before the You.

2. Pantheism

The topic of pantheism has prompted many questions. We must always think that every mistake is a truth gone mad. Pantheism is not unrelated to the recognition that “God is all in all,” but it forgets one thing: that God is the creator and that we are the created. Pantheism is first and foremost an ontological error: we are not a piece of God, we are God’s creatures: we are nothing before God, yet we are free before God. We are His creatures.

From an ontological misunderstanding descends an ethical, practical error, which is neglecting that the creature must respond to its Creator. He has a responsibility towards God, towards every man, towards nature.

Denying this responsibility, the illness of “wanting to disappear into the whole” (pantheism) has difficulty taking root in the movement, because it is distant from our temperament and sensibility. But it has won over many in the West—think of the ease with which euthanasia is requested: life is hard, ugly, nothingness is desirable, drowning in nothingness becomes desirable. I’m afraid we’re beginning to feel the symptoms of this too. I’m thinking of the fear after the pandemic of so many of our young people about living and leaving home. It is a dominant fear in our communities, but also in our parishes. The fear of living that we experience so many times too.

“All is God.” We read it in the Monday Morning Prayer: “For ‘in Him we live and move and have our being’”. Everything, because it exists, has existence in common with God, it shares in God’s existence, it shares in Being.

Remembering to be in Him, in His presence, does not point to an insignificance of the self, but towards the greatness of everything, it gives weight to every word, as Jesus said. The distinction between me and Him does not fuse my humanity with His, but marks the possibility of a dialogue of my freedom with His, of a relationship—it will be said later—of a friendship.

This is the only way to find the courage to sustain hope for man, because we participate in the Being of God without being fused to Him.

3. Asking for Being and Extraneousness

When we ask for something to go in a certain direction, for a cure to have an effect, for a loved one to say yes to us, when we ask to pass an exam, all this is asking to be, to be more: asking for fulfillment, for happiness.

And when a mother asks her child to eat a piece of fruit because it’s good for him, what is his good? That he grow up, that he be loved, fulfilled, happy; and ultimately? A mother, in the face of the sad possibilities that her child will have to go through, knows that what will guarantee him the possibility of gladness is the encounter with Christ. I don’t know how often the reason for the request to eat fruit is so profound, but I think statistically it is much more so than the mom herself thinks.

Let’s not conflate the small good with the big good; let’s help each other remember—because it can be forgotten—how the small good points toward the big good. If it is deliberately denied, it is because we want to selfishly possess the other, because something extraneous comes into the relationship. The extraneousness depends on the presence of something different from the history in which the Mystery was manifested, contaminating the consciousness and even nullifying the facts in which the

Lord was manifested and is manifested. Extraneousness leads us to live as if no encounter and no fact of salvation had happened in our lives. It is the ultimate lie.

Why do we succumb to it? Simply put: because there is an original disorder that is allied with the culture of our time. It is the mystery of original sin: the name we can give to the rebellion against “God all in all.” It begins with reticence toward the Lord’s presence (setting Him aside in our lives) and His plan of salvation; and then, if we do not respond, we slip into denial of the encounter. We too can slip into denial of the encounter. It is the temptation to replace the presence of the Mystery with something that we control and dominate (with power, we said). As also happened to Jesus in the desert, but He won by reaffirming the presence of the Father. Lent is precisely the time when we convert to the Lord and win alongside Him.

How do we combat this extraneousness? With a familiarity with the Lord which we have encountered in our history. When I was in Brazil, Father Massimo Cenci and Father Giuliano Frigeni told me about a time when Father Massimo had his first meeting with the *indios*: everyone had gathered and seemed very attentive, later he came back beaming to the PIME [Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions. *Ed.*] residence and said: “Great success! They came from all the rivers and were very attentive!” The old father told him, “Ask them what they understood,” so Father Massimo gathered everyone together again and asked them the question, “What did you understand about what I said?”; someone answered, “*È o senhor que sabe*” (it is you who know), which indicated that he hadn’t understood anything! Father Massimo was distraught and said, “What I did was no use, I’m going back to Italy.” Father Giuliano didn’t give him a speech, he just told him: “Father Giussani...” and gave him the names of all his friends, as a memory of what the Lord has done in our history. Then Father Massimo changed approach and continued to live his relationship with people with a different method: rather than making a big show, he cultivated a relationship with people. From this, vocations were born, the movement was born, just think, in Manaus! Extraneousness is overcome first and foremost by deepening a familiarity with the Lord who manifests himself in history.

This familiarity becomes prayer, an entreaty to be: “Come, Lord Jesus, in this circumstance,” while being helped by objective signs like the sacraments, School of Community—those precious ten minutes—as well as the familiarity among us, the communion among us, our vocational company, where we find above all the comfort of closeness, clarity of judgment, penetration into the mystery of things, the attraction of truth. Would we think about the things we are talking about and deepening if our companionship did not exist? In our communion we find welcome, consolation, forgiveness, up to that great definitive word which is the word “mercy.”

Let’s proceed to the second part of this evening, with the introduction to the new text of the School of Community.

“CHRIST IS ALL AND IN ALL”

After posing, in the first lesson, the great question, “What is God for man?,” the second lesson approaches the other fundamental question: if God is all in all, “how can we know Him as this?” (p. 5).

The answer comes to us from another verse of St. Paul, taken from the letter to the Colossians, “Christ is all and in all” (Col 3:11).

First of all, (we are on p. 14) the text offers us a quotation from Saint Maximus the Confessor. Let’s reread it carefully, word for word, also because Giussani tells us that “it sums up the roots of all that we think and feel in our clear conviction of faith.”

So here is the quotation: “Christ is [...] all in all of us. He who embraces everything in Himself according to the unique, infinite, and most wise power of his bounty, as a centre into which all lines converge, so that the creatures of the one God may not remain strangers and enemies to each other, but have a common locus where they can manifest their friendship and their peace.” (p. 14). You will be able to read it again quietly, carefully. The full ten minutes will be spent meditating this beautiful passage of St. Maximus the Confessor alone!

Think how these words, now more than ever, give voice to the cry of our hearts: “Lord, You who are all in all, come! Come in this circumstance of war! You who enclose everything in you, come! Grant that the creatures of the one God may not remain strangers and enemies, grant that peoples at war may not remain enemies, that none of the refugees may be strangers to us! Give us a place and make us build places where friendship and peace will find a home. Friendship and peace.”

1. Nature and Destiny of the Person

But let us now see how Father Giussani goes on to explain to us “Christ is all and in all”.

Once again, he places ontology before ethics in this lesson.

- “God is all in all” is the nature of things, the being of things, which will be fully manifested on the last day, in the final goal: Paradise. “God all in all” is the final moment, but already present in reality from the beginning.

- Thus “Christ is all and in all,” in its ontological value, expresses the link between the person of Christ and the nature and destiny of every man. There is a link between the person of Jesus and every person who is born and comes into this world. Think: He is the link with every person who is born into this world! There is a relationship between Christ and everyone—everyone!—those who are born! This is the meaning of the last speech that Jesus addressed to the Father at the Last Supper, before His death: “For you granted him authority over all people that He might give eternal life to all those you have given Him” (see John 17:2). It is a life that passes in us through the Lord, Christ, Being, the ontology that came into our history.

In its ontological value, “Christ is all and in all” becomes decisive for man’s self-awareness (and, therefore, for his morality). “All and in all” indicates that Christ is the original source, the ultimate and adequate example by which man can conceive and live his relationship with everything. “Christ is all and in all” shows us how to live the relationship with all people and with all reality. Therein lies the moral value of the relationship with the Creator, man (the creature by excellence), society and history.

2. Imitating Christ

At this point, Father Giussani introduces us to understand that, in its essence, morality is the imitation of Christ.

If for man the relationship with God is a relationship with Jesus, then morality, for man himself, is the imitation of Christ’s behavior: He is the Master to be discovered, to be listened to, to be followed. Just as the first two did: “Master, where do you live?” “Come and see.” We too have responded to the encounter with Him, we have opened our hearts and seen.

Giussani adds: Christ continues in history, in all times, within the mystery of the Church. That “Master, where do you live?” happened for us through the Church, a company that has reached us and reaches us today: the Church with all its network. Therefore, the invitation to imitate Christ is addressed to all men, but first and foremost to us have been baptized, as authentically indicated by the Church.

At this point, we are reminded of the value of authority, with words on which we must dwell. Let me read a passage from p. 16: “So, from the institutional point of view, the authority is the contingent form that the presence of the risen Jesus makes use of as the operative expression of his friendship with man, with me, with you, with each one of us. This is the most striking aspect of the mystery of the Church, which most affects man’s self-respect, man’s very reason” that would like to dominate the whole universe. The Lord uses the fisherman of Galilee to be the point of reference for unity and judgment.

If, therefore, morality for man is to imitate Christ, the behavior of Christ, Father Giussani asks himself at this point (p. 17) the question that he will develop throughout the lecture: what is the behavior of Christ toward God, toward man, toward society and toward history? I will therefore mention these four points in a concise way to help the reading of this passage.

1. Jesus' Behaviour Towards the Father

This first point corresponds to paragraphs 3 (God is Father), 4 (Jesus' Behaviour Towards the Father) and 5 (From Friendship to Morality).

The fundamental trait of Jesus' being is the recognition that God is Father. The entire Gospel is studded with passages that tell us of this awareness that Christ has of the Mystery, "in Jesus' awareness there lives the totality of the Father's intrusiveness, the intrusiveness of the 'God who is all in all.'" (p. 17).

Of this Mystery as the Father, Jesus stresses: (p. 18)

- a) the creative power: the Creator
- b) supreme perfection
- c) the supreme factor: mercy

Notice what these three attitudes of Jesus mean for us who are called to imitate Jesus:

- a) Imitating Jesus in recognizing the Father as Creator means living religiosity in every gesture. It is offering: the value of the relationship between me and any reality in life is Christ.
- b) As men, to be perfect like the Father happens only as grace. The thread of morality is therefore the sincere entreaty for this grace: for this reason, in morality, what has to prevail is entreaty and begging rather than the fulfillment of a resolution (p. 20).
- c) Finally, Jesus came to fully reveal that the relationship that the Mystery has towards his creature is love and, therefore, mercy (p. 20-21). Giussani says: "Mercy [...] shows the attitude of the Mystery before any human weakness [we are weak and He reaches us through His mercy], mistake, or forgetfulness: God loves man no matter the crime he commits." (p. 21).

In the face of this, what then is the summit of our morality? The recognition and acceptance of this mercy. "We cannot beg of God the Father except as a surrender to His mercy." (p. 21).

At this point, he introduces the word "friendship." Friendship, a word that is also found in the proposed amendment of the *Memores* Statute, is a fundamental point for our life.

The supreme value of friendship was a theme that was close to Father Giussani's heart in those years. This is why "You or About Friendship" became the theme of the 1997 Exercises, a theme—among other things—which became the title of a book by Fr. Giussani that came out a few months later.

The attitude of Jesus towards the Father, which is recognition and acceptance of the Mystery as Mercy, represents "the supreme actualization of friendship" (p. 21).

Jesus' relationship with the Father is friendship. Friendship involves reciprocity: the initiative is God's, but the Son responds to the Father. "Jesus as a man acknowledges and accepts to be, Himself, His Father's mercy. Thus, He accepts to die: 'Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.' Just as obedience to the Father represents the source and the summit of virtue for the man Jesus, so for man morality [like friendship] is born as a prevalent, irresistible liking for a person who is present: Jesus [how can one not pause while reading these words?]. In spite of everything—attractiveness, sorrow, and crime—the attachment to Jesus prevails. Man's morality is born, then, as friendship with God as Mystery and, therefore, with Jesus, through whom and in whom the Mystery unveils, reveals and communicates Himself. True friendship is every relationship in which the other's need is shared in its ultimate meaning, that is, in that destiny for which and to which every need awakens and expresses man's thirst and hunger. For men to accept this love—that is expressed in the will of God, in the will of the Mystery who, by becoming a man, accepts death, his death for all His sons [because He loved us until the end, and this is the starting point of our awareness]—this is the beginning of morality, that is born as friendship with God. As for Jesus morality comes from accepting to be the very subject of the mercy of the Father—He accepts this Mystery that is communicated to Him [...] for man, for every man, morality is born as friendship with Him, with God in Him, in Jesus." (p. 21-22) How beautiful! This passage makes us want to continue reading, let's dwell on these pages, on these words.

Again, Giussani says: "Morality is born as friendship with God as Mystery and therefore with Jesus. Man's relationship with God as Mystery and therefore with Jesus starts and accomplishes all its greatness, its simplicity, its truth, its security, in St Peter's 'yes' to Jesus who asked him, 'Simon, do you love me?' [...] Therefore, morality for a Christian is *loving adherence*." (p. 22).

Every relationship of friendship therefore is really a gift that we receive, it is a gift to which we respond. It is like the encounter with the movement: we receive it as a gift and we respond with our “yes”. “Simon, do you love me?”, “You know that I love you.”

By gift, over time, in every relationship the need of the other is shared in its ultimate meaning, that is, in that destiny to which every need awakens and which constitutes the term of man’s thirst and hunger (p. 22).

In the Assembly that follows the lecture, there is a page on friendship which is too beautiful not to reread together (p. 35):

“The most sublime thing about a moral attitude like that which Christ teaches us is that every action—as relationship with God, with Jesus, with the humanity of the individual and of society—is friendship. Every human relationship is either friendship or otherwise it lacks something, it is defective or false. [...] Every relationship is friendship in that it is a gift, it represents a gift or it has the possibility of being one, which comes from God, or from Christ, or from the Church, or from man’s history: it is a gift, friendship, which we welcome [...] accept. Accepting and welcoming this gift makes reciprocal the love that He, who gave it to us, possesses, displays and shows. Accepting it is the love that we show to Him who gave us the gift. In this sense friendship is a reciprocity of gift, of love, because for a created being, like man, the supreme form of love for God is to accept that you are made by God, to accept to be, to accept being which is not one’s own but is given.”

Do you understand the difference between pantheism and Christianity?

2. Jesus’ Behaviour Towards Man

We’re on point 6: Light, Strength, and Help (p. 22).

Here Fr. Giussani summarizes Jesus’ attitude towards man, his sharing of His life with ours, with three words: light, strength and help.

a) Jesus is the source of **light**, that is, of clarity and truth (p. 22).

The values with which we judge are those that come to us from Jesus as Presence now: from the community of the Church to which one belongs, which is the visible aspect of His face. “Listening to the voice of the authority, that is of the Pope and of the official acts of the Church, is like the antidote to drinking in the slogans of the mass media” (p. 23).

b) Jesus is a source of **strength**: “Without me you can do nothing.” And here we return to the theme of begging: we are beggars, and the form of begging illuminated by Christ are the sacraments, the supreme form of prayer.

c) Jesus is a source of **help**: “I am among you as the one who serves;” and so for us, our relationship with others in Jesus is an experience of sharing. The secret spirit of every relationship and friendship is to want the destiny of the other, to accept that the other wants my destiny. Friendship, in a Christian sense, is fraternal friendship, it is the most familiar type of friendship.

3. Jesus’ Behaviour Towards Society

This corresponds to the first part of point 7: Within the World History: Ecumenism and Peace (from p. 25 to p. 27).

The passages of Jesus’ behavior toward the fatherland, toward political power, toward history, a behavior that has as its final objective the generation of a people through the life of the community, are very striking. In this way, ecumenism and peace building are realized. Father Giussani does not stop, so to speak, at the level of our “private” lives, at the level of our relationships with other people. He puts us in front of the behavior of Jesus toward society, up to the level of institutions: to the point of speaking to us about the fatherland and political power, the building of a people, the building of peace.

What value this wholeness assumes at the historical juncture we are living!

a) First of all, then, love of the fatherland, of the people in that fatherland. Let us think of when Jesus, in the splendor of the gold of the temple illuminated by the setting sun, sobbed before the destiny of his city, the city that would kill him a few weeks later. Father Giussani says, “it is pity like that of a mother who clings to her child so he does not fall into the mortal danger he’s headed for.” That is

why, in imitation of Christ, love for the fatherland “is a profound implication of Christian *pietas*, but only in as much as the fatherland is in function of earthly welfare and of the eternal good of the whole of mankind.” (p. 26).

b) Secondly, Jesus’ attitude towards political power. It is not something to be frowned upon, but “it draws its possible earthly positivity only if it is in function of a universe, of everybody, of everyone in the world.” (p. 26)

Is this not a light on our time?

4. Jesus’ Behaviour Towards History

This point is made explicit in the second part of point 7, which begins at the end of p. 27.

In the text there is a splendid passage: “As for Jesus the meaning of history was the fulfilment of the Father’s will [...] for man [...] the meaning of history [...] is Christ’s human glory. [...] imitation of Christ is to live every day the aim of every action as [...] [for] Christ’s human glory.” (p. 27)

It’s as simple as that. That’s why I keep talking about my encounters with Novices who have made their profession, about our friend who goes to the hairdresser’s and is impressed, and through her being impressed (“I wish I were like you!”) the human glory of Christ manifests itself. Imitating Jesus, following the Lord, being in relationship with Him wins in the face of any attempt of power.

This is called witnessing (p. 27). Witnessing is “the phenomenon by which men acknowledge—by a powerful grace [...]—of what reality is made, of what things themselves are made: it is made of Christ, and they shout it to everybody; they prove it by their own existence, by the transformed mode of their own existence as presence.” (p. 27)

Our life “deserves”, that is, is proportionate to the eternal, to the extent that it lives this memory of Christ. And it is this memory that educates the inescapable commitment of the Christian to serve the human community in culture, economy and politics (p. 28).

The outcomes favored in all this are ecumenism and peace (we have witnessed the flowering of this miracle many, many times in our works, in our history; how necessary both now seem in this society of ours, divided and made fragile by pandemics and war!)

Ecumenism and peace: the principle of every relationship is the realization of a friendship, in which human history finds the best help (p. 28).

Christian friendship is a participant in the generation of a people. Father Giussani describes it this way, “it is a conception of life, a way of feeling what is real, an honesty before the circumstances, an intense answer to a provocation according to a vision, a perception of our destiny of truth and happiness” (p. 29). This is our greatest contribution to history.

The violence of power will always attempt to destroy this people, we must take this into account.

Father Giussani concludes this passage by stating that “the Mystery as mercy remains the last word, even on all the ugly possibilities of history.” (p. 29).

CHRIST THE LIFE OF LIFE

The final part of today’s text is the one in which Father Giussani, who had followed the Exercises in the backstage area, takes the floor and answers the questions directly. These are extraordinary pages that allow us to summarize and throw new light on the contents of the lessons heard the previous day. I entrust to you a careful reading of these pages.

I dare only make a proposal. Among the answers, there is one that is like a great prayer that Father Giussani makes (it is on page 37). Father Giussani reveals, as if in a moment of extraordinary confidence, what he is, who Christ is for his life. Well, over the next few weeks, let’s repeat these words: let’s repeat them often, possibly every day. We might struggle at first, we may feel a certain hesitancy, a certain feeling of artificiality. But slowly these words will make their way into us, they will become more sincere, more true. Because they are true and they are ours: they are as true for you as they are for Father Giussani. So I read them back to you, like the first link in a long chain:

“I conclude this confidential stressing [culminating with the words about the Father’s mercy towards us and thus the origin of our task in history] of the points of my concern, by saying [this part, in my

opinion, pertains to a Father of the Church!]: Christ, this is the name that indicates and defines a reality I have encountered in my life. I have encountered: I heard of it when I was a child, as a boy, and so on. It is possible to grow up knowing the word Christ well, but for many people He is not encountered, He is not really experienced as being present. In my case Christ bumped into my life, my life bumped into Christ, precisely so that I should learn to understand that He is the central point of everything, of the whole of my life. *Christ is the life of my life*: in Him is summed up all that I would desire, all that I look for, all that I sacrifice, all that develops in me out of love for the persons with whom He has put me. [...] Christ, life of my life, certainty of a good destiny, and companionship in everyday life, a familiar companionship that transforms things into good. This is His efficacy in my life.” (p. 38)

Thank you for your attention. We will never cease to give thanks for this gift that has happened in our lives—“Christ is all and in all”.

Prosperi

Thank you, Father Filippo, because you have done a remarkable job. I think we will have a lot of work to do as well.

School of Community. Until the Fraternity Exercises, we will be working on the part of *To Give One's Life for the Work of Another* presented this evening, “Christ is All and in All” (pp. 14-39). At the time of the Exercises we will communicate the content and the ways in which the work of the School of Community will continue from May onwards.

Finally, let's watch the Easter Video-Poster together, which is available on the CL website and social media channels.

[video projection]

The sentences in the poster are by Pope Francis and Father Giussani:

“Christ's resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force. Often it seems that God does not exist: all around us we see persistent injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty. But it is also true that in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life and sooner or later produces fruit. On razed land life breaks through, stubbornly yet invincibly.” (Pope Francis).

“*Christ is the life of my life*: in Him is summed up all that I would desire, all that I look for, all that I sacrifice, all that develops in me out of love for the persons with whom He has put me. Christ is a man who lived as everybody else two thousand years ago, but who, risen from the dead, invested by the power of the Mystery—in which by then He participated in His own nature—takes hold of us day after day, hour after hour, action after action.” (Luigi Giussani).

In conclusion, on my own behalf and on behalf of all of you, I thank Monsignor Santoro for the help he has given us and I wish him and everyone a good journey as we await Holy Easter.

I greet everyone, those present and those connected online.

Veni Sancte Spiritus