MARCH Word of Life

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. (Ps. 51[50]: 10

Word of Life

for ages 4-8 | for ages 9-17 | Print | Audio

The phrase of Scripture offered to us during this Lenten season is part of Psalm 51. In the twelfth verse, we find the poignant and humble invocation, 'Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.' The passage in which the sentence is found is known as the 'Miserere'. In this text, the author begins by exploring the hidden places of the human soul in order to understand its deepest nuances. On one hand, there is an awareness of a deep inadequacy in our relationship with God but, at the same time, there is an insatiable yearning for full communion with the One from whom all grace and mercy proceed.

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The Psalm takes its cue from a well-known episode in David's life. He has been called by God to care for the people of Israel and to lead them on the paths of covenant obedience; however, he transgresses during his mission. After committing adultery with Bathsheba, he ensures that her husband, Uriah the Hittite, an officer in his army, is killed in battle. The prophet Nathan reveals to him the seriousness of his guilt and helps him acknowledge it. This is the moment when he confesses his sin and is reconciled with God.

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The psalmist describes the king using heartfelt forms of invocation that flow from his deep sense of repentance and total trust in divine forgiveness: 'erase,' 'wash me,' 'cleanse me.' In particular, in the verse that interests us, he uses the verb 'create' to indicate that complete deliverance from human frailty is possible only for God. It expresses the realization that only God can make us new creatures with 'pure hearts', filling us with his life-giving spirit, giving us true joy and radically transforming our relationship with him, with other people and with nature and the cosmos through a 'steadfast spirit'.

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How can we put this word of life into practice? The first step is to recognize that we are sinners in need of God's forgiveness and to have an attitude of immense trust in him. Maybe our repeated mistakes make us feel discouraged and tempt us to close us in on ourselves. When

this happens, we should try to keep the door of our heart open, at least a little. In the early 1940s, Chiara Lubich wrote to someone who felt unable to go beyond her own limitations: *'You need to remove every other thought from your soul and believe that Jesus is drawn to us when we humbly and lovingly confide in him and tell him our sins. What we have and do is wretched; there is only one attitude God will show us: mercy*. *Our souls can be united with him only by offering him as our gift, as our only gift, not our virtues but our sins! ... If Jesus came to earth, if he became man, if he longed for one thing alone... it was to be a Saviour, to be a Physician! It is the only thing that he wanted.'* **[i]**

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Then, once freed and forgiven and mindful of the help we receive from others, because Christians find strength in the community, let us set out to concretely love our neighbour whoever they may be. '*What is asked of us is mutual love, service, understanding and sharing in the sufferings and joys of others. We are asked for a love that covers and forgives all, and which is typical of the Christian.'* **[ii]**

Finally, Pope Francis says, ' G*od's forgiveness... is the greatest sign of his mercy. It is a gift that every forgiven sinner is called to share with every brother and sister he meets. All those whom the Lord has placed beside us, family, friends, co-workers, parishioners... everyone needs, as we do, the mercy of God. It is beautiful to be forgiven, but you too, if you want to be forgiven, forgive in turn. Forgive!...Be witnesses to his forgiveness, which purifies the heart and transforms life.'* **[iii]**

Edited by Augusto Parody Reyes & the Word of Life Team.

[i] C.Lubich 'Lettere 1943-60' pub Citta Nuova 2022
[ii] C. Lubich. Word of Life May 2002
[iii] Pope Francis General Audience 30 Mar 2016