

February Word of Life

‘A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you’ (Ezek 36:26).

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The word ‘heart’ makes us think of our affections, our feelings and our passions. For people writing in the Bible, however, it meant a great deal more. Together with the spirit it is the centre of life, the centre of what it means to be a person. It is the place of decisions, of our inner being, of our spiritual life. The heart of flesh lets itself be governed by the word of God, lets itself be led by it and thinks ‘thoughts of peace’ about its brothers and sisters. The heart of stone is closed in upon itself, incapable of listening and of having mercy.

Do we need a new heart and new spirit? It’s enough just to look around us. Violence, corruption and war, hide hearts of stone that are closed to God’s plan for creation. If with sincerity, we also look within ourselves, do we not feel that we are often motivated by selfish desires? Are our decisions really guided by love, by the good of the other?

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Observing the sad state of our human race, God is moved by compassion. He who knows us better than we do ourselves and knows we need a new heart. He promises this to the prophet Ezekiel, thinking not just of individuals, but of the whole of his people. The dream of God is to recreate his idea from the beginning, a great family of peoples, shaped by the law of mutual love. History has shown us how, on the one hand, very often we, alone, are incapable of carrying out his project and how, on the other, God has never tired of putting himself on the line, even to the point of promising he would himself give us a new heart and a new spirit.

He lives up to his promise in full when he sends his Son to the earth and pours out his Spirit on the day of Pentecost. A community is born, the community of the first Christians in Jerusalem, an icon of humanity characterized by being ‘one heart and soul.’

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And me, the one writing this brief commentary, and you too who read it or listen to it, we are all called to be part of this new humanity. What’s more, we are called to build it around us, to make it present where we live and work. Just think what a tremendous mission has been put into our hands and how great the trust God gives us! Instead of being depressed in the face of society that often seems corrupt, instead of resigning ourselves in the face of evils that are bigger than we are and closing ourselves off in our indifference, let’s enlarge our hearts ‘to the measure of the heart of Jesus. How much work that means! Yet this is the only thing necessary. When this is done, all is done,’ to use the words of Chiara Lubich’s invitation. She went on to

say, 'It means loving everyone we meet as God loves them. And since we live in time, we must love our neighbours one by one, without holding in our heart any left-over affection for the brother or sister met a moment before.'^[1] Let's not trust in our frail strength and ability, but in God's gift to us: 'A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you.'

If we let ourselves be governed by the invitation to love every person, if we let ourselves be guided by the voice of the Spirit in us, we become living cells of a new humanity, people who craft a new world, in the midst of the varieties of peoples and cultures.

Fabio Ciardi