

January Word of Life

'Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue' (Deut. 16:20)

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The Book of Deuteronomy is made up of a series of speeches Moses gave towards the end of his life. He reminds the younger generation of the laws given by the Lord to the People of Israel, while he himself can see from afar the Promised Land to which he has courageously guided them.

In this Book, the 'law' of God is presented first of all as the 'word' of a Father who takes care of all his children. It is a way of journeying through life that God has given his people to fulfil the Covenant he has made with them. If the people observe the law faithfully, out of love and gratitude more than out of fear of punishment, they will continue to enjoy God's presence and protection.

The Covenant has been received as a gift from God and one practical way of fulfilling it is to be very determined in pursuing justice. Believers keep the Covenant not only when they are thankful to God for choosing his people, and when they avoid worshiping anyone but the Lord, but also when they refuse benefits that cloud their conscience concerning the needs of the poor.

'Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue.'

In daily life, we come across many situations of injustice, some of which are very serious. They affect people who are already vulnerable and those who live on the margins of society. There are so many 'Cains' who act violently towards their brothers or sisters.

Eradicating inequality and abuse is a basic demand of justice that has to start in our own heart and in all the places we frequent.

However, God does not do justice by destroying Cain. Instead, he wanted to protect him so that he can resume his journey. God's justice is done by giving new life.

We Christians are people who have met Jesus. By his words and deeds, and above all by giving his life and the light of the Resurrection, Jesus showed us that God's justice is found in his infinite love for all his children.

Through Jesus, a path opens up before us in which we can practice and spread mercy and forgiveness, which are also the foundations of social justice.

'Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue.'

This verse of Scripture has been chosen to celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2019 which, in the northern hemisphere, runs from 18 to 25 January. If we too welcome this Word, we can commit to seeking pathways to reconciliation, first of all among Christians. By putting ourselves at everyone's service, we will effectively heal the wounds of injustice.

For several years now, Christians from various churches have had this experience when working together to help prisoners in the city of Palermo (Italy). Salvatore, who belongs to an evangelical association, first had the idea: "I realized that these neighbours of ours had spiritual and human needs. Often their families were not able to help them. Trusting in God, I shared this with many brothers and sisters in my own church and other churches". Christine, from the Anglican Church, added: "Being able to help these needy neighbours makes us happy because it shows God's providence in real terms. God wants his love to reach them all, through us." Nunzia, who is Catholic, said: "It seemed an opportunity both to help people in need and witness to Jesus also through small material things."

This experience is a practical application of what Chiara Lubich spoke about in 1998, during an ecumenical meeting in the Evangelical Church of St Anne in Augsburg:

"If we Christians take a look at our history, ... we will be saddened to see that it has often been a succession of misunderstandings, quarrels and conflicts. Certainly it was due to historical, cultural, political, geographical, and social circumstances, but also because Christians were lacking in what is their specific unifying feature: love.

Efforts in the field of ecumenism will be fruitful in so far as those who dedicate themselves to it see in Jesus crucified and forsaken, who re-abandons himself to the Father, the key to understanding every disunity and to re-establishing unity ... When unity is lived, it has an effect ... It is the presence of Jesus among people, in the community. Jesus said: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Mt 18:20). The presence of Jesus between a Catholic and an Evangelical who love each other, between Anglicans and Orthodox, between an Armenian and a Reformed Christian who love each other - how much peace it would bring even now, how much light it would shed for a productive ecumenical journey!"

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