

September Word of Life

‘Every day I will bless you, and praise your name forever and ever.’ (Ps 145 [144]:2)

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The quotation from Scripture that is offered to help us on our journey this month is a prayer. It is a verse taken from Psalm 145. The Psalms are compositions which reflect the individual and collective religious experience of the people of Israel in their historic journey and the uncertainties of their existence.

Prayer in the form of poetry rises up to the Lord as lament, supplication, thanksgiving and praise. Within this breath lies the whole range of emotions and attitudes with which people express their lives and their relationship with the living God.

The underlying theme of Psalm 145 is the kingship of God. Based on his personal experience, the psalmist acclaims God's greatness: ‘Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised’ (v. 3); he glorifies his goodness and the universality of his love: ‘The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made’ (v.9); he acknowledges his faithfulness: ‘The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds’ (v.13b), and he even goes so far as to involve every living being in a cosmic song: ‘All flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever’ (v.21).

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In modern times, however, people may sometimes feel abandoned and alone. They fear that what happens each day is a matter of chance, just a succession of events devoid of meaning and purpose.

This psalm carries a reassuring proclamation of hope. As St. John Paul II said at an audience in 2003: ‘God is the creator of heaven and earth. He is the faithful keeper of the covenant that binds him to his people. He is the One who does justice to the oppressed, gives the bread that sustains the hungry and frees the captives. It is he who opens the eyes of the blind, raises up the fallen, loves the righteous, protects the stranger, sustains the orphan and the widow ...’.

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This word invites us, first of all, to cherish our personal relationship with God by accepting his love and mercy without reservation. It invites us to place ourselves before this mystery and to listen to his voice. This is the foundation of all prayer. But this love is never separated from love for our neighbour. So when we imitate God the Father in concretely loving every brother and sister, especially the least, those who are rejected by others and those who are lonely, we come

to perceive his presence in our daily lives.

Chiara Lubich, when invited to speak of her Christian experience before an assembly of Buddhists, summed it up this way: '... the heart of my experience is this: the more we love human beings, the more we find God. The more we find God, the more we love men and women.'

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But there is another way to find him. In recent decades humanity has gained a new awareness of the great challenge of ecological problems. Young people in particular are driving forward the recognition of a need for change: they propose a simpler lifestyle with a rethinking of development models and the search for alternative sources of energy. They also show commitment to the right of all inhabitants of the planet to have clean water, food and air. In this way human beings can not only rediscover their relationship with nature but also praise God as, filled with amazement, they discover his tenderness toward all creation.

This is the experience of Venant M. who, as a child in his native Burundi, used to wake up at dawn to the sound of birdsong and then travel dozens of kilometres in the forest to go to school. He felt fully in tune with the trees, animals, streams, hills and with his companions. He had a sense of being close to nature and felt he was a living part of an ecosystem in which creatures and Creator were in total harmony. This awareness became praise, not just in that moment but throughout the whole day.

Some might ask: what about those of us who live in cities? 'Safeguarding nature is a rare occurrence in our concrete metropolises built by human hand amid the din of the world,' said Chiara Lubich. 'Yet, if we wish, the sight of blue sky glimpsed between the tops of skyscrapers is enough to remind us of God; a ray of sunshine that succeeds in penetrating between the bars of a prison, is enough; a flower, a meadow, a child's face... '

Edited by Augusto Parody Reyes and the Word of Life team.