

**“A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you.” (Ez 36: 26)**

The word ‘heart’ makes us think of affections, feelings and passions. However, for the bible writers it meant much more. Together with the spirit, the heart is the centre both of life and of the person; it is the place where decisions are made, the place of our inner life, our spiritual life. A heart of flesh is docile to the word of God and allows itself to be guided by the word, giving rise to “peaceful thoughts” about others. Instead, a heart of stone is closed in on itself and is unable to listen or be merciful.

Do we really need a new heart and a new spirit? It is enough to look around and see the violence, corruption and wars that are caused by hearts of stone which are not open to God’s plan for creation. If we look honestly within ourselves, we can see that we are often motivated by selfish wants. Does love truly guide our decisions? Are we guided by what is good for others?

Seeing our impoverished humanity, God was moved to compassion. He knows us better than we know ourselves and he knows we need a new heart. He promised this to the Prophet Ezekiel, thinking not only of individuals but of all his people. God’s dream is to recreate one large family of peoples, as was his original intention, which is guided by the law of mutual love. History has often shown that while, on the one hand, we cannot fulfill God’s plan on our own, on the other He has never tired of getting involved, to the point of promising that he himself would give us a new heart and a new spirit.

He kept his promise to the full when he sent his Son on earth and when he poured out his Spirit on the day of Pentecost. A community began – the first Christian community in Jerusalem – which was an icon of humankind living as “one heart and one soul”.<sup>1</sup>

All of us, you who are reading or listening to this commentary on the Word of Life and I who am writing it, are called to be part of this new humanity. Moreover, we are called to edify this new humanity around us, bringing it into the places where we live and work. What a great mission has been given to us and how great is God’s trust in us! Instead of feeling depressed at seeing how corrupt society seems to be; instead of resigning ourselves to evils that are bigger than us, and shutting it all out as if we were not concerned, let’s widen our hearts “according to the measure of the heart of Jesus. How much work that means! Yet this is the only thing necessary.” This is what Chiara Lubich asked us to do and she went on saying: “It means loving everyone we meet as

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Acts* 4:32.

God loves them. And since we live in time, we must love our neighbors one by one, without holding in our heart any left-over affection for the brother or sister met a moment before".<sup>2</sup>

Let's not trust in our own strength and abilities, which are inadequate, but let's trust in God's gift to us: "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you."

If we respond willingly to the call to love each person, if we allow ourselves to be guided by the voice of the Holy Spirit in us, we will become living cells of a new humanity, builders of a new world, in the great diversity of peoples and cultures.

Fabio Ciardi

*This month we will be living this Word, which was chosen by an ecumenical group in Germany, together with brothers and sisters of various Churches, so as to let God's promise accompany us during the whole of this year in which we are commemorating the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation.*

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<sup>2</sup>C. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, New City Press 2002, p.81.