

Finally, Pope Francis tells us: “God’s forgiveness (...) is the greatest sign of his mercy. It is a gift that every forgiven sinner is called to share with every person they meet. All those whom the Lord has placed beside us - family, friends, coworkers, 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.”<sup>3</sup>

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and the Word of Life Team

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3. Pope Francis, General Audience, March 30, 2016.

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Each month the Focolare chooses a Scripture passage as a guide and inspiration for daily living. The commentary on it was originally written by founder, Chiara Lubich (1920–2008). Today this Word of Life, written by an international commission and translated into 96 different languages, reaches several million people worldwide.

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## “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me.”

(Ps 51:10)

The phrase of Scripture offered to us during this Lenten season is from Psalm 51. In the tenth verse, we find the poignant and humble invocation, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me.” This psalm is one of the “penitential psalms” in which David asks forgiveness for his sins, acknowledging that only God’s mercy can save him. He begins by recognizing that he has “done evil in your sight,” in the most hidden places of his heart, and that God is justified in his sentence. But at the same time he expressed his insatiable yearning for full communion with God, the source of every grace and mercy, asking him to “restore me to the joy of your salvation.”

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The psalm is written after a well-known episode in David’s life. He had been called by God to care for the people of Israel and to lead them on the path of obedience to the covenant. And yet he violated his mission. After committing adultery with Bathsheba, he ensured that her husband, Uriah the Hittite, an officer in his army, would be killed in battle. The prophet Nathan shows 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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In this psalm David uses heartfelt forms of invocation, which come from his deep sense of repentance and total trust in divine forgiveness. “Purge me,” he says, “wash me,” “blot out all my iniquities.” In particular, in the verse we have taken for this month, he uses the verb “create” to indicate that complete deliverance from human weakness is possible only from God. It expresses the realization that only God can make us truly “new,” with “clean 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, by giving us 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 immense trust in his mercy.

Maybe our repeated mistakes make us feel discouraged and tempt us to close 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 the fact that she had sinned miserably. Chiara told her: “We need to remove every other thought from our mind and believe that Jesus is attracted to us precisely because of our humble, honest and loving confession of our sins. In and of ourselves, whatever we have and do is despicable. Instead, God, on his part, has no other attitude toward us than mercy. Our souls can be united to 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 savior, to be a physician! He desired nothing else.”<sup>1</sup>

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Then, once freed and forgiven, and mindful of the help we receive from others, since Christians find strength in their community, let us start loving every neighbor in concrete ways, whoever they may be. In another place, Chiara wrote: “What is asked of us is mutual love, consisting of service and understanding, of sharing in the sufferings, anxieties and joys of our brothers and sisters. This is a love that covers over everything, forgives everything, the love that is the typical of a Christian.”<sup>2</sup>

1. Chiara Lubich, *Letters 1943-1960*, Citta Nuova, 2022.
2. Chiara Lubich, *Word of Life*, May 2002.