

Word of Life Resources

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Workbook for Word of Life Meetings



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m o v e m e n t

Dear community leaders,

With the motto: "Called and Sent", proposed by the Work of Mary for this year, let us move forward in the light of this month's Word of Life, taken from Psalm 51. It says: "**Create in me a pure heart, O God, renew within me a steadfast spirit**". This phrase, in the context of the psalm, is the psalmist's humble imploration to God, after recognizing his misery and ineptitude before Him; but it also expresses an insatiable longing for communion with God from whom all mercy proceeds. This would be a good imploration, asking the Lord to help us to live in the best way, this Lent, to prepare ourselves to celebrate Easter at the end of this month.

Given this, we thought it appropriate to propose going **In-Depth** with a writing by an Italian bishop, bishop Antonio Bello, inspired by a phrase he read on a sign that was placed next to a Crucifix. The sign read: "Provisional Placement". Based on it, the Bishop wrote a beautiful reflection that speaks of the provisional aspect of being crucified; this situation, however hard it may be, always has an end and culminates with Easter. We also propose a brief writing of Iginio Giordani in which he explains how the fraternity of the children of God, re-established in Christ Jesus, is the fruit of the Resurrection.

As **NEWS**, we take up once more the Pope's Lenten message of last year in which he speaks of this time as an asceticism, a synodal journey that has transfiguration as its goal and is realized with the grace of the paschal mystery through two paths: that of listening to Jesus who speaks in the Scriptures, but also through the brothers, and that of the "retreat", which encourages us, with the grace of the Resurrection, not to fear and to rise up to be artisans of synodality in the life of our communities.

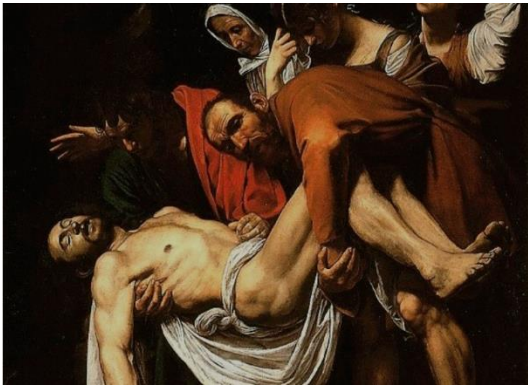
We conclude with three **Experiences**: among them, is the one shared by Caleb, a young man, during the Way of the Cross at the World Youth Day in Lisbon. An experience which speaks of the mercy of God.

With you, in the light of this month's Word of Life, we commit ourselves to live Lent in the best way possible and thus prepare ourselves to celebrate Easter as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Warmest greetings to each one of you,
The Team of the Word of Life Workbook

The Parking lot of Calvary

By Bishop Antonio Bello (1935/1993) Italian Bishop



"In the Old Cathedral of Molfetta, there is a large terracotta crucifix. A local sculptor donated it a few years ago. The parish priest, while waiting to place it permanently, leaned it against the wall of the sacristy, and affixed a card to it with the words 'temporary placement.' (...)

Provisional placement. I think there is no better formula to define the Cross. My cross, your cross, not just Christ's. (...)

The Gospel invites us to consider the provisionality of the Cross. There is a sentence that sums up the tragedy of creation at the time of Christ's death: "From noon until three o'clock in the afternoon, it became dark over all the earth." (...)

From noon until three o'clock in the afternoon. Here are the banks bordering the river of human tears. Here are the portcullises that compress into circumscribed spaces all the gasps of the earth. (...)

From noon to three in the afternoon. Only then is it permitted to stand on Golgotha. Outside of that time, there is an absolute ban on parking. After three hours, there will be forced removal of all crosses. A longer stay will be considered abusive even by God. (...)

Take courage, brother who suffers. There is also for you a deposition from the cross. There is also for you a superhuman mercy. The pierced hand that

is peeling yours from the wood is here; the friendly face, soaked in blood and crowned with thorns, touching your feverish forehead with a kiss. (...)

Courage. It is only moments before three o'clock in your afternoon. Before long, darkness will give way to light, the earth will regain its virginal colors, and the Easter sun will break through the fleeing clouds. "*"

* Source: The parking lot of Calvary, in LVD, Molfetta, 1985, no. 1, p. 17-19..

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The fruit of redemption



Jesus is risen. Happy Easter! Beginning with the Gospel account, Iginio Giordani reveals to us the fraternal dimension of the resurrection.

Jesus, risen from the dead, appeared to the women who had come to the tomb; and said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and proclaim to my brothers...'

And, thus, in those concluding moments, he gave the disciples their definitive name: that of being brothers and sisters. Coming out of death into glory he thus defined his relationship with humankind. As he presented himself then, he still presents himself now, as a brother: the firstborn. By rising again, he had conquered death and reclaimed fraternity. He had come to earth to restore the Father's fatherhood; he had descended into hell to overcome the enemy of humankind; now he was declaring the re-established fraternity of us children, in the family of God.

All of us are included in redemption and therefore all of us are brothers and sisters. If we do not act as such, we are outside of redemption.

Igino Giordani

Taken from: Igino Giordani, *Il fratello*, [Our brother] (I edition Città Nuova 2011 – III edizione, Figlie della Chiesa 1954).

Originally published here: <https://www.focolare.org/en/2023/04/09/francais-il-frutto-della-redenzione/>

March 2024

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. (Ps. 51[50]:10

The phrase of Scripture offered to us during this Lenten season is part of Psalm 51. In the twelfth verse, we find the poignant and humble invocation, 'Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.' The passage in which the sentence is found is known as the 'Miserere'. In this text, the author begins by exploring the hidden places of the human soul, to understand its deepest nuances. On one hand, there is an awareness of a deep inadequacy in our relationship with God but, at the same time, there is an insatiable yearning for full communion with the One from whom all grace and mercy proceed.

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

The Psalm takes its cue from a well-known episode in David's life. He has been called by God to care for the people of Israel and to lead them on the paths of covenant obedience; however, he transgresses during his mission. After committing adultery with Bathsheba, he ensures that her husband, Uriah the Hittite, an officer in his army, is killed in battle. The prophet Nathan reveals to 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.

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

The psalmist describes the king using heartfelt forms of invocation that flow from his deep sense of repentance and total trust in divine forgiveness: 'erase,' 'wash me,' 'cleanse me.' In particular, in the verse that interests us, he uses the verb 'create' to indicate that complete deliverance from human frailty is possible only for God. It expresses the realization that only God can make us new creatures with 'pure 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 through a 'steadfast spirit'.

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

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 an attitude of immense trust in him.

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 her own limitations: *'You need to remove every other thought from your soul and believe that Jesus is drawn to us when we humbly and lovingly confide in him and tell him our sins. What we have and do is wretched; there is only one attitude God will show us: mercy. Our souls can be united with 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 Saviour, to be a physician! It is the only thing that he wanted.'*¹

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Then, once freed and forgiven and mindful of the help we receive from others because Christians find strength in the community, let us set out to concretely love our neighbor whoever they may be. *'What is asked of us is mutual love, service, understanding, and sharing in the sufferings and joys of others. We are asked for a love that covers and forgives all, and which is typical of the Christian.'*²

Finally, Pope Francis says, *'God's forgiveness... is the greatest sign of his mercy. It is a gift that every forgiven sinner is called to share with every brother and sister he meets. All those whom the Lord has placed beside us, family, friends, co-workers, parishioners... everyone needs, just 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. Forgiven. Be witnesses to his forgiveness, which purifies the heart and transforms life.'*³

Edited by Augusto Parody Reyes & the Word of Life Team.

¹ C.Lubich 'Lettere 1943-60' pub Citta Nuova 2022

² C. Lubich. Word of Life May 2002

³ Pope Francis General Audience 30 Mar 2016

Points to reflect on and Points for Dialogue

- The text that contains the psalm "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew within me a steadfast spirit" is known as the Miserere. In it, the author's gaze is aimed at exploring the hidden recesses of the human soul to capture its deepest fibers, those of our profound inadequacy before God and, at the same time, the insatiable longing for full communion with the One from whom all grace and mercy come.
- The psalm is inspired by a well-known episode in the life of David. It is the moment of confessing his sin and being reconciled with God.
- The psalmist puts in the king's mouth very strong invocations that spring from his deep repentance and total trust in God's forgiveness: "blot me out", "wash me", "purify me".
- Our recurrent errors may discourage us and lock us up in ourselves. In those moments it is necessary to leave the door of our heart ajar, at least a little.
- Once liberated and forgiven, and counting on the help of our brothers and sisters - because the Christian's strength comes from the community - let us begin to love our neighbor concretely, whoever he or she may be. "What is asked of us is that mutual love based on service, understanding and sharing in the pains, anxieties, and joys of our brothers; that all-embracing, all-forgiving love that is proper to the Christian".

Points for dialogue during the meeting

- The phrase of Scripture that is proposed to us during this Lenten season is part of what psalm and what do we find in verse 12?
- The psalm is inspired by a well-known episode, from whose life? What was David called to and how did he break his mission? Which prophet reveals to him the seriousness of his guilt and helps him to recognize it?
- In the verse that interests us, what verb does he use in particular and to indicate what?
- How shall we put this word of life into practice?
- What did Chiara Lubich write in the early 1940s to a person who felt unable to overcome her miseries?
- What does Pope Francis tell us about God's forgiveness?

Pope Francis: Our Lenten journey is synodal

In his Message for Lent 2023, Pope Francis highlights the relationship between the Lenten journey and the synodal journey, which are both rooted in tradition and open to newness.

By Christopher Wells

Personal and ecclesial “transfiguration” is the goal of the ascetical journey of Lent, and similarly of the synodal process, writes Pope Francis in his Message for Lent 2023.

The message, signed on the Solemnity of the Conversion of St Paul and released on Friday, bears the title “Lenten Penance and the Synodal Journey.”

Our Lenten journey is synodal

Pope Francis takes his inspiration from the Gospel account of the Transfiguration, proclaimed each year on the Second Sunday of Lent. As with the chosen disciples at the Transfiguration, Jesus “takes us with Him to a place apart” during the season of Lent. “Lenten penance,” he writes, “is a commitment, sustained by grace, to overcoming our lack of faith and our resistance to following Jesus on the way of the cross.”

This requires effort, sacrifice, and concentration, which are also requirements for the Synodal Journey; therefore, we can say that “our Lenten journey is ‘synodal’ since we make it together along the same path, as disciples of the one Master.”

"Both in the liturgical journey and the journey of the Synod, the Church does nothing other than enter ever more deeply and fully into the mystery of Christ the Savior."

Helping us understand God's will

Like the journey of the disciples up to Mount Tabor, Pope Francis acknowledges that the synodal process can seem arduous and lead to discouragement.

Yet, he says “what awaits us at the end is undoubtedly something wondrous and amazing, which will help us to understand better God’s will and our mission in the world.”

Pointing to the appearance of Moses and Elijah – representing the Law and the Prophets – at the Transfiguration, Pope Francis says, “Similarly, the synodal journey is rooted in the Church’s tradition and at the same time open to newness.” He explains that “tradition is a source of inspiration for seeking new paths and for avoiding the opposed temptations of immobility and improvised experimentation.”

Listening and daily effort

To reach our goal of personal and ecclesial transformation or conversion, Pope Francis proposes two paths inspired by the Transfiguration of Jesus.

The first is listening to God’s Word and to our brothers and sisters. The Pope reminds us that listening to Christ often takes place in listening to our brothers and sisters in the Church.

The second path involves facing the reality of the daily struggles of life, without getting caught up in extraordinary events and experiences. Pope Francis reminds us that neither Lent nor the synodal process are ends in themselves but are leading us to the experience of Easter.

“Let us go down then to the plain,” the Pope says in conclusion, “and may the grace we have experienced strengthen us to be ‘artisans of synodality’ in the ordinary life of our communities.”

Originally published here: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-02/pope-francis-the-lenten-journey-is-synodal.html>

Experiences

Former Addict & Catholic Convert Says The Eucharist "brought Healing to My Soul" in Powerful WYD Testimony



Caleb, a 29-year-old young man from the United States, gave a powerful testimony about his journey to the Catholic Church during The Way of the Cross at World Youth Day.

Caleb told the story about his troubled past, including a wounded relationship with his father, his parents' divorce, and his struggles with drug addiction, depression, and self-harm.

He said his relationship with his now-wife led him to seek fullness in Christ.

"The Lord heard my cries, and he sent me the most beautiful gift. One who would eventually become my bride."

Caleb and his wife then became involved in a Protestant Church. He began teaching about the faith to students, which led him to conduct his own research into the Early Church.

He then realized the True Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and converted to Catholicism.

"To make a long story short, John 6, Jesus and the Eucharist, is what brought me home into full communion with the Catholic Church."

Experiences

Here is the full text of his experience:

"I feel a deep pain, and yet, at the same time, a great joy. The reality of my life is that I'm one of the last sheep that Jesus came running after. I grew up in a very broken household with a father who didn't really realize his worth and identity in Christ and was severely broken.

"As a result of his wounds, he wounded others, and one of my escapes from home life was always being a church. It felt as if it was my home away from home.

"I was raised in various different Christian traditions, but I always had a desire with my soul for more. I wanted that encounter with Jesus everyone around me seemed to be having, but I wasn't having for myself. Little did I know, looking back through all of that, he was right by my side.

"Approaching my high school graduation, my parents went through a horrendous divorce, and it just spiraled out of control. I sank deep into depression, struggled with self-harm, became a drug addict, and I really had a desire to end my life. I let the pain lead me to embrace all the selfish desires that were within me.

"Everything I had known was gone. I had no sense of direction, my head was in such a dark place from the pain, and I had searched for a reason to live.

"The Lord heard my cries, and he sent me the most beautiful gift. One who would eventually become my bride.

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"Once I met my wife, I found a reason to live and a desire to grow in my faith. I wanted the passion she had for Jesus, but battling the ghosts of my past, it just always felt unattainable.

"After dating for some time, we separated for a while, and I was faced with a choice to make, I could either let Jesus take full control of my life or go back to my old habits.

"By His grace, I pressed on, and working in a tattoo shop, I saw those were forgotten by society and I saw Jesus in them and who He truly was.

"After much healing, my wife and I got back together and were eventually married.

"We became heavily involved in our church and I was tasked with passing on the faith to our students. I realized quickly I didn't know what the faith was.

"I started researching the Early Church in both biblical and historical resources.

"To make a long story short, John 6, Jesus and the Eucharist, is what brought me home into full communion with the Catholic Church.

"Now as I reflect, I've realized that the father wound that I've had has caused me to have an identity crisis but after embracing the identity my Heavenly Father has given me, I've finally started to heal.

"And being united fully to Jesus in the Eucharist has brought healing to my soul.

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"After tasting all of this world has to offer, Jesus truly is the only one who has satisfied me."

Originally published here: <https://www.churchpop.com/former-addict-gives-powerful-testimony-of-his-journey-to-catholicism/>

The Gospel in action: Interwoven experiences

Along the way

"Taking the same route every day, I usually come across a multitude of people. There are those who cross the street when they shouldn't, those who honk at me for a jumpstart at the traffic light, those who try to cut in front of me... Luckily, at times I manage to remember that each one of them is a brother and so... even the most chaotic traffic becomes less complicated. It was particularly hot one day, and I noticed that a homeless person, whom I had seen many times, had fainted on the sidewalk. That was his street corner, and that piece of carton was his house.

"He generally did not appear to be sick, and I had never stopped for him before, but seeing that something was wrong, even if I was late for my deliveries, I couldn't act as if nothing had happened. My van, however, stuck in a zone of intense traffic, immediately called the attention of the local police, who from afar made signs to make a move. I mimed that I wanted to take a look at that person in trouble. They continued to urge me to go away, pointing to the booklet of fines. I thought that they themselves should have taken care of the man, but seeing their indifference, I ran into a bar to get a fresh drink for that poor man. When

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I returned, I caressed his cheek gently so as not to wake him suddenly. Thank God he regained consciousness but was tired and scared. I put the glass to his lips, and he answered with a smile, thanking me continually. In the end, also the policemen arrived and seeing that scene, put the fines booklet back into their pockets and greeted me with a smile.”

Alexander – Greece

Bouncers

“I alternate my studies with work as a ‘bouncer’ in a pub: not a fulfilling job at all and at times, even risky, especially when you have to deal with drunks. One month, the Word of Life invited us to be the first to love. How could I live that at my work? As a start, I tried to be the first to smile and greet the clients, even if I got no response. After a week, to my great joy, I saw that people started to answer my greetings. So, it worked! And to add, if before with the more ‘difficult’ guys I would adopt harsh methods, now seeing Jesus in every person, I try to be polite, and take interest in them. In this way, in critical moments I manage to avoid brawls and calm people down. And it is, in a sense, a preventive measure which furthermore earns the esteem of my clients and my boss. If anyone asks me why I act this way, it is the occasion to speak about God who is Love. The atmosphere in the club now has changed and resulted in attracting new clients.”

M. – Polynesia

Experiences

Originally published here:

<https://www.focolare.org/en/2015/05/02/vangelo-vissuto-due-storie-in-filigrana/>