

(English translation)

Rome, 25 April 1982¹

Word of Life

‘You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you’ (Jn 15:3).

I think when the disciples heard this clear word of encouragement spoken by Jesus, their hearts must have leapt for joy.

How wonderful if Jesus were to say it to us as well!

In order to be slightly more worthy of it, let’s seek to understand it.

Jesus had just been using his well-known image of the vine and the branches. He is the true vine, the Father is the vine-grower, who cuts off every branch that bears no fruit and prunes every branch that does bear fruit so that it may bear more.

Having said this, he declared:

‘You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.’

‘You have already been cleansed...’ What sort of purity is meant?

It is that inner attitude needed to stand before God, the absence of obstacles (like sin, for instance) opposed to contact with the sacred, to meeting the divine.

To have this purity, we need help from on High.

Already in the Old Testament, people had realized that human beings are unable to approach God on their own strength alone. God must purify the heart; he must give a new heart.

A beautiful Psalm says: ‘Create in me a clean heart, O God’ (Ps 51:10).

‘You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.’

According to Jesus there is a means to be pure, and it is his word. That word which the disciples had heard, and had kept to, had purified them.

Jesus’ word, in fact, is not like human words. Christ is present in the word just as, in a different way, he is present in the Eucharist. Through the word Christ enters into us. By accepting it, by practising it we allow Christ to be born and to grow in our heart.

Pope Paul VI said: ‘How does Jesus become present in souls? Through the communication of the word the divine thought is conveyed, the Word, the Son of God made man is conveyed. We could assert that the Lord becomes flesh within us when we allow the word to come and live within us.’²

‘You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.’

The word of Jesus is also compared to a seed sown into the depths of the believer. When it is welcomed, it penetrates and, like a seed, it develops, grows, bears fruit, ‘Christifies’, making us like Christ.

¹ *Città Nuova*, 1982/8, pp.42-43.

² Pope Paul VI to the parishioners of St Eusebius, Rome, 26 February 1967.

The word, interiorized thus by the Spirit, really has the ability and the strength to keep the Christian far from evil. As long as we let the word act in us, we will be free from sin, and so pure. We will sin only if we stop obeying truth.

‘You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.’

How then should we live so as to deserve praise from Jesus?

By putting into practice each word of God, by being nourished by the word moment by moment, by making our lives a work of continuous re-evangelization. And doing this so as to have the same thoughts and feelings as Jesus, to relive him in the world, to show the divine purity, the clarity of spirit the Gospel gives to a society so often caught up in evil and sin.

During this month then, if possible (that is, if there are others who want the same as we do), let's try in a special way to put into practice the word that expresses the commandment of mutual love. In fact John the Evangelist, who reports the words of Jesus we are considering today, sees a link between the Word of Christ and the New Commandment.

According to John, it is in the context of love for one another that the word is lived with its effects of purification, holiness, preservation from sin, closeness to God. The isolated individual is unable to resist the promptings of the world for long, while in mutual love he or she finds a healthy setting able to protect a genuine Christian life.

Chiara Lubich