

Open your mind, your arms, your heart
“Learn to do good; seek justice.” (Is 1:17)

By Patrizia Mazzola and the Word of Life team

The Word of Life for the month of January is taken from the first chapter of the prophet Isaiah. This passage was chosen for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which is celebrated throughout the Northern Hemisphere January 18–25.

The texts were prepared by a group of Christians from Minnesota (where in May 2020 George Floyd, an African American man, was murdered by a police officer in Minneapolis).

The subject of justice is a hot topic. Inequality, violence and prejudice worsen within a society that struggles to witness to a culture of peace and unity.

Isaiah’s times were not so different from ours. Wars, rebellions, the pursuit of wealth, power, idolatry and the marginalization of the poor had led the people of Israel astray. The prophet uses harsh words to call his people back to a path of conversion, and he points the way to a return to the original spirit of the covenant God made with Abraham.

“Learn to do good; seek justice.”

What does it mean to learn to do good? It means that we need to be open to the idea of learning, and that requires effort on our part. Each day, there is always something to understand or something to improve. We can always start again if we have made a mistake.

What does it mean to seek justice? This is a treasure that we should yearn and search for as the goal of our actions. Practicing justice helps us learn to do good, because it means we better understand the will of God, which is our good.

Isaiah offers concrete examples. The people most preferred by God are the helpless, the oppressed, the orphans and the widows, because they are the most defenseless. God invites his people to take practical care of others, especially those who are unable to assert their rights. Religious practices, rites, sacrifices and prayers are not pleasing to him if they are not matched by the pursuit and practice of goodness and justice.

“Learn to do good; seek justice.”

This Word of Life urges us to support others, to have a watchful eye and practically help those in need. Our journey of conversion requires us to open our hearts, minds and arms to others, especially toward those who suffer.

“The desire and the search for justice have always been inscribed in the human conscience,” wrote Focolare founder Chiara Lubich in a Gospel commentary in November 2006. “God himself put them in our hearts.

“But despite the conquests and progress made throughout history, how distant we are from fulfilling God’s plan! The wars that are still being fought today, as well as terrorism and ethnic conflicts, are the sign of social and economic inequalities, injustice, hatred...

“Without love and respect for the individual and attention to his or her situation, personal relationships may be correct, but they can also become bureaucratic and incapable of providing decisive answers to human requirements.

“Without love there will never be true justice, goods will never be shared between rich and poor, and there will never be attention to the life and specific needs of each man and woman.”

“Learn to do good; seek justice.”

To live for a united world means taking the wounds of humanity upon ourselves and carrying out small gestures that can help build up the human family.

One day, J. from Argentina bumped into the headmaster of the institute where he had taught. The headmaster had used an excuse to force him to leave his job.

When the headmaster recognized him, he tried to move away, but J. went towards him. He asked him for his news, and the headmaster told him about his difficulties, that he lived in another city and was looking for work.

J. offered to help him, and the next day he spread the news among his acquaintances that he was looking for a job for someone. The response was not long in coming.

When the headmaster received the news of an offer for a new job, he could hardly believe his ears! He accepted the job, deeply grateful and moved that the very person he had once fired had taken a real interest in him.

J. then received the “hundredfold” because, at the same time, he was offered two jobs that he had always wanted since he started university. He too was amazed and touched by this practical love of God.

Read more:

Chiara Lubich, *Essential Writings*, New City Press: 2007, pp. 236–247 and 337–342.

Chiara Lubich, *Living Dialogue*, New City Press: 2009.

Next month:

“You are the God who sees me.” (Gen 16:13)

Since the beginning of this year, an international team prepares the monthly Word of Life commentary. Its members come from different cultures, churches, age groups and vocations. The commentary is the fruit of the work of two scripture experts, enriched by the communion of the group members. To underline this communitarian work, the name of the final author is always accompanied by the addition “and the Word of Life team.”

This commentary is written for a mainly Christian audience and is also available online at livingcitymagazine.com and as a podcast.