

The LORD Is There

Session 12. A New Heart

God's answer to the heart of stone is not a demand but a transplant.

What We Found

The rescue in this chapter does not begin with Israel's suffering; it begins with God's name. The exile made the nations conclude that the LORD had failed his people, and God announces that he will act 'not for your sake ... but for the sake of my holy name's sake.' That stings for a moment, and then it liberates: a rescue anchored in God's own character is exactly as unbreakable as God, which is more than could ever be said of a rescue anchored in our performance.

Then came the transplant. We counted the verbs of verses 24-28 and found God the subject of nearly every one: I will take, gather, bring, sprinkle, cleanse, give, put, cause. In chapter 18 God commanded, get yourselves a new heart; tonight he promises, a new heart I will give you. What he commands, he gives. And we traced the promise forward into the New Testament, to a midnight conversation about being born of water and the Spirit, and to a line about hearts sprinkled clean and bodies washed: the Church has long heard verse 25 at the font, and appoints this passage among the readings of the Easter Vigil, the great night of baptisms.

And we opened the envelope. Eleven weeks ago we each guessed where God would choose to dwell by the end of this book, and tonight the text gave its most intimate answer so far: within you, by his own Spirit, in a heart of flesh. Some guesses hit that center. Others are still waiting, because the book is not finished, and we agreed to keep every guess open until the last night.

Voices of the Church

St. Augustine of Hippo, d. 430

You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.

Confessions I.1.1.

For the group. The heart of stone is, among other things, a restless heart. Tonight God promises not to polish the stone but to replace it with a heart that can finally rest in him.

St. Athanasius of Alexandria, d. 373

St. Athanasius teaches, in substance, that God saves his people not because they have earned rescue but because it would be unworthy of his own goodness to let the work of his hands be ruined. God's faithfulness to his own goodness, and so to his own name, is on this account the surest ground of our hope, not the shakiest.

On the Incarnation. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For anyone stung by 'not for your sake ... but for the sake of my holy name': Athanasius shows why that sentence is the best news in the chapter. A rescue anchored in God's own character cannot fail the way a rescue anchored in our performance would.

St. Ambrose of Milan, d. 397

St. Ambrose teaches, in substance, that the water of the font does nothing by itself: it is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit that makes the water cleanse and give new life, so the newly baptized should not see mere water but God at work.

On the Mysteries. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. This is Ezekiel 36:25-27 in one breath: sprinkled water and indwelling Spirit as a single divine act. It is also what the Church means by a sacrament: not our ritual reaching up, but God's action reaching down through a sign he chose.

Live It This Week

Practices

1. **Holy water, slowly.** Every time you enter a church this week, take the holy water deliberately, not on autopilot, and say to yourself: the cleansing Ezekiel promised is fulfilled here, in water and the Spirit. Let the sign preach to you.
2. **Go to Confession.** The Catechism says conversion is first of all God's grace giving a new heart (CCC 1432), and this is the sacrament where the transplant is tended for the rest of your life. If it has been a while, this is the week.
3. **Pray Psalm 51:10 each morning:** create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. One line, every day, before your feet hit the floor.
4. **Find your baptism date.** Ask a parent or your parish if you do not know it, and put it in your calendar as an annual feast. It is the day Baptism sacramentally applied to you the cleansing and the gift of the Spirit that Ezekiel 36:25-27 promises.

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 36:26

"A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

Ezekiel 36:26

Go Further in the Catechism

- **CCC 715.** the prophets promise the Spirit and a new heart
- **CCC 1287.** the Spirit poured out on the whole messianic people
- **CCC 1432.** God must give the new heart; conversion is first his grace
- **CCC 694.** water as the sign of the Spirit's action in baptism

Before next session. Read Ezekiel 37 before we meet again.