

Create a clean heart within me, O God.

Psalm 51:10

The isolated philodendron branches lay side by side on the spread newspaper. Each spidery root had been gently shaken clean from the old, depleted soil. A new, larger pot was being readied with fresh soil, rich in nutrients and the promise of growth. This was the annual ritual of possibility celebrated by the green-thumbed gardener who lived next door.

God, too, is such a gardener. God's liturgy for divine renewal has been written for us in the life of Christ. Its elements are clear, even stark, in this season of Passion. It is a liturgy of obedience, the ability to hear God's will pulsing in the veins of our life experience.

What is it in our lives that clings to the old soil? What place in us will not let go of past hurts, harbored resentments, prejudices, false securities and fears? The conversion of our self-absorption is a lifelong spiritual challenge heard in the psalmist cry, "Create a clean heart within me, O God."

But we walk this week with Jesus, who learned this obedience through his sufferings. We listen to him remind us that the grain must fall into the ground and die before it can be fruitful. Like the branches spread out and shaken from their old roots, our hearts must be uprooted and cleansed by our immersion into the passion and death of Jesus. Only in that cleansing grace do the challenges of our life find meaning.