

ENCOURAGEMENT ENCOURAGEMENT

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‘Hope’

This year we have with a special Jubilee Year. These jubilee years focus on different themes and happen mostly every 50 years but an extra one has been designated more recently every 25 years. Pope Francis has decided that 2025 will be a year of Jubilee, with the theme “Pilgrims of Hope”, and is a year of hope for a world suffering the impacts of war, the ongoing effects of covid-19 pandemic, and a climate crisis. You may think that it is a good idea as we all need that spirit of hopefulness when all around us in recent times, has been filled with sadness and violence in so many parts of the world, not to mention famine and natural disaster. Indeed, it is most important that we pray with hope.

However, let us look a little more closely at what hope really is. We use the word lightly to mean a kind of looking at the future positively, or in the case of more pessimistic folk, that at least it will not be worse. We all know the ‘glass half empty or the glass half full’ type of people. You may think of hope as simply a means of saying that that something is likely to happen such as the expression ‘I hope you have a happy birthday, holiday or event’. It may also be a genuine expression for a person’s wellbeing as ‘I do hope that you get better soon.’ These expressions are all fine but are they what is meant by Holy Hope and as part of the Jubilee??

The words of the Hymn ‘Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all Joy’ give us a good lead in. The words continue with ‘whose trust ever childlike no cares could destroy’ This in a few words takes us into another perspective on Hope. It is always worthwhile to look at a definition of Hope in the Catechism. Hope of course, is one of the Theological Virtues together with Faith and Charity.

A ‘theological virtue’ is one that relates specifically and immediately to God. When the lives of people who are being adjudged as Saints, it is these virtues that are examined. They may have strengths in all three but especially one of them. Their strengths in any of these is carefully looked at. In other words how did their lives relate to God... were they shining examples of Faith or Hope etc. So how does the catechism define the Virtue of Hope...?

‘Hope is a supernatural gift of God, by which we firmly trust that God will give us eternal life and the means necessary to obtain it, if we do what he requires of us.’



It also states that we can aid our reception of it by grace, prayer and the sacraments...

The focus therefore is on looking forward to that eternal life... it is a gift that leads us to realise that our lives are completed in the life hereafter and all within that scope is a journey. Now that does not mean that we abandon doing that thing that upbuilds the Kingdom of God and live our lives worthy of being called Christians. We are all called to fulfil our obligations in whatever path of life that we are on. That may mean duties to family, work and the wider community. It means care of the world we live in and the people in our remit, and wider, who need our help and support.

But we can get weary and St Paul, so often an encourager, tells the Romans (15:13) ‘May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.’ But it is not always easy to have that hope and trust in the Holy Spirit. People can become tired and grow faint and lose heart. Eternal life may be the end goal and promise, but it

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‘If you do not Hope you will never find what is beyond your hopes.’

St. Clement of Alexandria

may seem such a long way away and doubt can seep in that makes us lose hope. Again, St. Paul tells the Galatians this time (6.9) “Let us not become weary in doing good, for the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up”. Holy hope can also be witnessed in the lives of others.

When Saint Thomas More was about to be beheaded and was being taunted by the people around him, he made it clear that he knew where he was going. Taunted further he was asked ‘Are you sure of that...?’ implying that he was not guaranteed a place in heaven, and maybe not at all... But he answered. ‘Yes, I know where I am going, for a God I love so much, would not deny me a place in Heaven’. That in essence is the virtue of Hope. Hope grounded in Faith and love.

Too often Christian hope is taken as a false desire or even an arrogance not to mention stupidity... But the virtue of hope can give us that assurance that God is faithful in all His promises. The Old and New Testament gives many examples of how hope can lead us to be free from worry and anxiety of any kind, for the end will always bring peace and fulfilment.

The troubles of the world we live in are transitory, in our own lives but also in the destiny of all people. Jesus is the Hope of all Nations, and we are promised a new heaven and a new earth. Maybe this year we can practice this virtue and begin anew so that we do not become despondent but courageous and steadfast in our belief in a Redeeming Creator.

We have an opportunity to look at this important Virtue in the light of both the Jubilee as well as all the current world events. We can also reflect on our own biases towards sadness and despair, rather than a hope that the Lord will sort it all out for us at the end. We are called to be givers of Hope to others.

It is difficult to do that if we are hope-less ourselves.



May we live our lives to the full in this world and transfigure it with the hope of future glory....

So have a blessed year and live in the Holy Hope of eternal life.

Halina Holman ©

Pope Francis

We must fan the flame of hope that has been given us and help everyone to gain new strength and certainty by looking to the future with an open spirit, a trusting heart and far-sighted vision. The forthcoming Jubilee can contribute greatly to restoring a climate of hope and trust as a prelude to the renewal and rebirth that we so urgently desire; that is why I have chosen as the motto of the Jubilee, Pilgrims of Hope....

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The spiritual dimension of the Jubilee, which calls for conversion, should also embrace these fundamental aspects of our life in society as part of a coherent whole. In the realisation that all of us are pilgrims on this earth, which the Lord has charged us to till and keep.

Extract from Letter at start of Jubilee 2024

Prayer:

Father in heaven, may the faith you have given us in Your son, Jesus Christ, our brother, and the flame of charity enkindled in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, reawaken in us the blessed hope for the coming of your Kingdom.

May the grace of the Jubilee reawaken in us, Pilgrims of Hope, a yearning for the treasures of heaven. May that same grace spread the joy and peace of our Redeemer throughout the earth. To you our God, eternally blessed, be glory and praise for ever.

Feast Days in January

1st Mary, Mother of God

2nd Saints Basil & Gregory

3rd The Most Holy Name of Jesus

4th St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

5th Sunday of the Epiphany St. John Henry Neumann

12th Sunday, The Baptism of Our Lord

13th St. Hilary 14th St. Felix de Nola

15th St. Isidore of Alexandria 17th St. Anthony of Egypt

19th Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

20th Saints Fabian & Sebastian

21st St. Agnes

24th St. Francis de Sales

25th The Conversion of St. Paul

26th Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

26th Saints Timothy & Titus

27th St. Angela Merici

28th St. Thomas Aquinas

30th St. Aidan

31st St. John Bosco