

May 19, 2024

Dear Friends,



God's blessings as we celebrate Pentecost Sunday! The fifty days of the Easter Season have now come to a close (*hence the word 'pentecost' meaning '50'*)! Our Easter Candle, the paschal candle, has been in the sanctuary since the Easter Vigil. After today, it will be moved to the baptistry and be lit for every baptism and every funeral in our parish church until next Easter! This happens in every parish community and helps remind parents and godparents that the Spirit emboldens the newly-baptized who receive a small baptismal candle in the celebration of this sacrament. Likewise it will symbolize for grieving families at a funeral liturgy that our Risen Lord is the light of the world – our Savior and Redeemer – the resurrection and the life!

This paschal light is truly a powerful symbol helping us recall the mystery of faith.

The candle evokes for us the One who literally 're-members' the community. It retells in symbolic form the reality of resurrection and the ascension of Our Risen Lord in whom we have been strengthened, united, gifted, and in whom we will live forever. This is the light that shatters the darkness of fear. This is the light of which we sang in the *Exsultet* at the Easter Vigil! *"Be glad, let earth be glad, as glory floods her, ablaze with light from her eternal King, let all corners of the earth be glad, knowing an end to gloom and darkness."* This is the light of Christ who will guide us in the Spirit as each new day unfolds!



Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, reiterated this last week when he spoke of the Ascension and the coming of the Spirit: *"Jesus' return to the Father appears to us not as His detachment from us, but rather as preceding us to the destination, which is Heaven. Just as, when in the mountains, one ascends to a summit: one walks, with difficulty, and finally, at a turn in the path, the horizon opens up and one sees the panorama. Then the whole body finds the strength to tackle the final ascent. The whole body - arms, legs and every muscle - tenses up and concentrates to reach the peak.*

"And we, the Church are precisely that body that Jesus, having ascended to Heaven, pulls along with Him, like a roped party. It is He who awakens us and communicates to us, with His Word and with the grace of the Sacraments, the beauty of the Homeland towards which we are headed. Hence, we too, His members – we are the members of Jesus – ascend with joy together with Him, our leader, knowing that the step of one is a step for all, and that no-one must be lost or left behind, because we are but one body (cf. Col 1:18; 1 Cor 12:12-27).



"Listen carefully: step by step, one rung at a time, Jesus shows us the way. What are these steps that must be taken? Today's Gospel says: "preach the Gospel, baptize, cast out

demons, pick up serpents, lay hands on the sick” (cf. Mk 16:16.18); in summary, to perform the works of love: to give life, bring hope, steer away from any form of wickedness and meanness, respond to evil with good, be close to those who suffer. This is the “step by step”. And the more we do this, the more we let ourselves be transformed by the Spirit, the more we follow His example, as in the mountains, we feel the air around us become light and clean, the horizon broad and the destination near, words and gestures become good, the mind and heart expand and breathe.

“And so we can ask ourselves: is the desire for God, the desire for His infinite love, for His life that is eternal life, alive in me? Or am I a bit dulled and anchored to passing things, or money, or success, or pleasure? And does my desire for Heaven isolate me, does it seal me off, or does it lead me to love my brothers and sisters with a big and selfless heart, to feel that they are my companions on the journey towards Paradise? May Mary, She who has already arrived at the destination, help us to walk together with joy towards the glory of Heaven.”

“Transformed by the Spirit.” These are powerful words reminiscent of the way the Spirit has guided the community for two thousand years and will continue to do so until the end of time! Here are some thoughts about this powerful Pentecost moment, the ‘birthday of the Church” from Fr. Foley:



Gone, but Lost Forever? *The most essential thing we can say is that the Holy Spirit is completely and truly God.*

This is the last Sunday of the Easter season! Its Mass is vivid and exciting. The words of the inspired texts are clear:

*Suddenly there came from the sky
a noise like a strong driving wind,
and it filled the entire house in which they were.*

*Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire,
which parted and came to rest on each one of them.
And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit
and began to speak in different tongues,
as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. (First Reading)*

Wouldn't you have loved to be there? How thrilling it would have been! Even more delightful, look at the wording. The noise was not an actual wind but something "like" a wind. And these were not tongues of fire, but tongues "as of fire" (i.e., "as if they were made of fire"). These were marvels that could not be described "as is." So the writer used metaphors. Imagine it this way:



There was this sound that came from the sky, something that sounded like, uh, oh, let's see, uh, wind! That's it. It wasn't wind but that is the closest I can get to it. And then stuff that looked sort of like chunks of fire, or maybe like tongues made out of fire. Only it wasn't really fire. Or tongues either. Oh, I can't describe it. It was a presence that is very real but too deep for words. So "as if" becomes a way to help us sense it. We call this procedure "metaphor," or just "comparison." It was "as if."

Why does it seem to different today, prophesying and talking in tongues as the apostles did? *(For people in charismatic movements there is the "slaying in the Spirit," and also what Saint Paul called "glossolalia" or speaking in tongues. Yet it is safe to say that for a majority of Church members the experience is other than this.)* Paul handles this question beautifully in the Second Reading, but the answer is also found by recalling who the Holy Spirit is, as we have been doing in previous weeks.



The most essential thing we can say is that the Holy Spirit is completely and truly God. The third person of the Holy Trinity comes to dwell within us. No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. No wonder it is hard to describe! As time went by, the bestowal of the Spirit became less dramatic but just as real. For instance, look at Acts 19:1-8, in which Paul came upon a dozen or so disciples who had never even heard of the Holy Spirit! He baptized them, and "as he laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied."

It was the sacrament of Baptism! Today, when we receive baptism and other sacraments, we are receiving the Holy Spirit! But gently and in ritual form. Christ and his Father come to dwell within us, but quietly. Alright, then why do we not act as someone who has God within us?



Well, like anything planted so deep, the Spirit's presence must have time to make its way into our actions, our words, our deeds. Whenever we find acts of charity or joy in ourselves, or patience and kindness, or the ability to endure hardship and injuries; when we are tempted toward mildness and modesty, then we can know that the Holy Spirit is at work within us. It is not as if heavy winds and tongues of fire are raging, as in former days. But it is the same Spirit of Jesus and of the Father the one we have celebrated, this Easter season. – Fr. John Foley, SJ

You will notice that there are many choices of Scripture readings for this Pentecost weekend. One of these choices is from Paul's inspired letter to the Galatians about which Fr. Rolheiser comments for us: *If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit. (Gal 5:25)*



Who Am I to Judge? *Only when we are living inside these virtues are we living inside God's Spirit.*

Perhaps the single, most-often quoted line from Pope Francis is his response to a question he was asked vis à vis the morality of a particularly dicey issue. His infamous-famous reply: who am I to judge? Although this remark is often assumed to be 'flighty' and less-than-serious, it is, in fact, on pretty safe ground. Jesus, it seems, says basically the same thing. For example, in his conversation with Nicodemus in John's Gospel, he, in essence, says: I judge no one. If the Gospel of John is to be believed, then Jesus judges no one. God judges no one.



But that needs to be put into context. It doesn't mean that there aren't any moral judgments and that our actions are indifferent to moral scrutiny. There is judgment — except it doesn't work the way it is fantasized in the popular mind. According to what Jesus tells us in John's Gospel, judgment works this way:

God's light, God's truth, and God's Spirit come into the world. We then judge ourselves according to how we live in the face of them. God's light has come into the world, but we can choose to live in darkness. That's our decision, our judgment. God's truth has been revealed, but we can choose to live in falsehood, in lies. It's our decision, our judgment to make.

And God's Spirit has come into the world, but we can prefer to live outside that spirit, in another spirit. That, too, is our decision, our judgment. God judges no one. We judge ourselves. Hence we can also say that God condemns no one, though we can choose to condemn ourselves. And God punishes no one, but we can choose to punish ourselves. Negative moral judgment is self-inflicted. Perhaps this seems abstract, but it is not in fact. We know this existentially. We feel the brand of our own actions inside us. To use just one example: how do we judge ourselves by the Holy Spirit.



God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is not something so abstract and slippery that it cannot be pinned down. Saint Paul, in the Epistle to the Galatians, describes the Holy Spirit in terms so clear that they can only be rendered abstract and ambiguous by some self-serving rationalization. He describes and defines the Holy Spirit.

So as to make things clear, he sets up a contrast by first telling us what the Holy Spirit is not. The Spirit of God, he tells us is not the spirit of self-indulgence, sexual vice, jealousy, rivalry, antagonism, bad temper, quarrels, drunkenness, or factionalism. Anytime we are cultivating these qualities in our lives, we should not delude ourselves into thinking we are living in God's Spirit, no matter how frequent, sincere, or pious is our religious practice. The Holy Spirit, he tells us, is the Spirit of charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

goodness, trustfulness, gentleness, and chastity. Only when we are living in these virtues are we living within God's Spirit.



So, then, this is how judgment happens: God's Spirit has been revealed. We can choose to live inside the virtues of that Spirit or we can choose to live instead inside their opposites). One choice leads to a life with God, the other leads away from God. And that choice is ours to make; it doesn't come from the outside. We judge ourselves. God judges no one. God doesn't need to judge.

When we view things inside this perspective, it also clarifies a number of misunderstandings that cause confusion inside the minds of believers as well as inside the minds of their critics. How often, for instance, do we hear the following criticism: if God is all-good, all-loving, and all-merciful, how can God condemn someone to hell for all eternity? A valid question, though not a particularly reflective one. Why? Because God judges no one; God punishes no one. God condemns no one to hell. We do these things to ourselves: we judge ourselves, we punish ourselves, and we put ourselves in various forms of hell whenever we do choose not to live in the light, the truth, and inside God's Spirit. And that judgment is self-inflicted, that punishment is self-inflicted, and those fires of hell are self-inflicted.



There are a number of lessons in this. First, as we have just seen, the fact that God judges no one, helps clarify our theodicy. That is, it helps deflate all those misunderstandings surrounding God's mercy and the accusation that an all-merciful God could condemn someone to eternal hellfire. Beyond this, it is a strong challenge to us to be less judgmental in our lives, to let the wheat and the darnel sort themselves out over time, to let light itself judge darkness, to let truth itself judge falsehood, and to, like Pope Francis, be less quick to offer judgments in God's name and more prone to say: "Who am I to judge?" – *Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI*

Paul is not the only one! Remember the words of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel: "*Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?*" Surely the meaning of the Ascension and of Pentecost can continue to enlighten us on our spiritual journey:



THE MYSTERY OF THE ASCENSION *The ascension deepens intimacy by giving us a new presence*

What is the Ascension? The Ascension is an event in of the life of Jesus and his original disciples, a feast day for Christians, a theology, and a spirituality, all woven together into

one amorphous mystery that we too seldom try to unpackage and sort out. What does the Ascension mean? How can we see it in relation to Pentecost and the whole paschal mystery?

Among other things, it is a mystery that is strangely paradoxical. Here's the paradox: there is a wonderful life-giving gift in someone entering our lives, touching us, nurturing us, doing things that build us up, and giving life for us. But there's also a gift in the other eventually having to say goodbye to the way he or she has been present to us. Passing strange, there's also a gift in one's going away. Presence also depends upon absence. There's a blessing we can only give when we go away.



That's why Jesus, when bidding farewell to his friends before his ascension, spoke these words: "It's better for you that I go away. You will be sad now, but your sadness will turn to joy. Don't cling to me, I must ascend." How might we understand these words? How can it be better that someone we love goes away? How can the sadness of a goodbye, of a painful leaving, turn to joy? How can a goodbye eventually bring us someone's deeper presence?

This is hard to explain, though we have experiences of this in our lives. Here's an example: When I was twenty-two years old, in the space of four months, my father and mother died, both still young. For myself and my siblings, the pain of their deaths was searing. Initially, as with every major loss, what we felt was pain, severance, coldness, helplessness, a new vulnerability, the loss of a vital life-connection, and the brute facticity of the definitiveness of death for which there is no adequate preparation. There's nothing warm, initially, in any loss, death, or painful goodbye.



Time, of course, is a great healer, but there's more to this than simply the fact that we become anaesthetized by the passage of time. After a while, and for me this took several years, I didn't feel cold anymore. My parents' deaths were no longer a painful thing. Instead their absence turned into a warm presence, the heaviness gave way to a certain lightness of soul, their seeming incapacity to speak to me now turned into a surprising new way of having their steady, constant presence in my life, and the blessing that they were never able to fully give me while they were alive began to seep ever more deeply and irrevocably into the very core of my person. The same was true for my siblings. Our sadness turned to joy and we began to find our parents again, in a deeper way, at a deeper place of soul, namely, in those places where their spirits had flourished while they were alive. They had ascended, and we were better for it.

We have this kind of experience frequently, just in less dramatic ways. Parents, for instance, experience this, often excruciatingly, when a child grows up and eventually goes away to start life on his or her own. A real death takes place and an ascension must happen. An old way of relating must die, painful as that death is. Yet, as we know, it's better that our children go away.

The same is true everywhere in life. When we visit someone, it's important that we come; it's also important that we leave. Our leaving, painful though it is, is part of the gift of our visit. Our presence depends partly on our absence.



And this must be carefully distinguished from what we mean by the axiom: *Absence makes the heart grow fonder.* For the most part, that's not true. Absence makes the heart grow fonder, but only for a while and mostly for the wrong reasons. Physical absence, simple distance from each other, without a deeper dynamic of spirit entering beneath, ends more relationships than it deepens. In the end, most of the time, we simply grow apart. That's not how the ascension deepens intimacy, presence, and blessing.

The ascension deepens intimacy by giving us a new presence, a deeper, richer one, but one which can only come about if our former way of being present is taken away. Perhaps we understand this best in the experience we have when our children grow up and leave home. It's painful to see them grow away from us. It's painful to have to say goodbye. It's painful to let someone ascend.

But, if their words could in fact say what their hearts intuit, they would say what Jesus said before his ascension: "It's better for you that I go away. There will be sadness now, but that sadness will turn to joy when, one day soon, I will be standing before you as an adult son or daughter who is now able to give you the much deeper gift of my adulthood." – Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI



On the day of Pentecost before the coming of the Spirit, the disciples were just an insignificant group only minutes before, cowering behind locked doors. Suddenly they were filled with power, speaking with great courage and freedom "and in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them." So often, we explain the birth of the Church in terms of this reading. Was the Church "astounding" on the first Pentecost? How could it "astound" today? Did the Holy Spirit come only once in history, as in the upper room? Or do we see the Holy Spirit as dynamic and constant in all of life? The disciples were different after the Spirit's arrival. Are we confident that the Spirit is with us? Will the Spirit work through us in some way to change things that need changing: Climate crisis? Hunger? Immigration? Racial bias? Trafficking? Loneliness? May our hearts be open to the Spirit not just in looking back but in being open to the grace of the Spirit each day! According to Pope Francis, what is the Paraclete telling the Church today? Here are the Holy Father's thoughts for us:

"Let us go another step. We too are called to testify in the Holy Spirit, to become paracletes, comforters. The Spirit is asking us to embody the comfort he brings. How can we do this? Not by making great speeches, but by drawing near to others. Not with trite words, but with prayer and closeness. Let us remember that closeness, compassion and tenderness are God's "trademark," always. The Paraclete is telling the Church that today is the time for comforting. It is more the time for joyfully proclaiming the Gospel than for

combatting paganism. It is the time for bringing the joy of the Risen Lord, not for lamenting the drama of secularization. It is the time for pouring out love upon the world, yet not embracing worldliness. It is the time for testifying to mercy, more than for inculcating rules and regulations. It is the time of the Paraclete! It is the time of freedom of heart, in the Paraclete.” One further clue on this solemnity comes to us from Fr. Dennis Hamm, SJ:



Pentecost has a strong Old Testament and Jewish connection. Long before it became a Christian feast, Pentecost had been a Jewish feast. Attending to that fact helps us understand Luke's narrative of what has rightly been called “the birth of the Church.” *Pentecostes* (Greek for “fiftieth”) is the Greek name for the Jewish feast of Weeks — so-called because it occurs seven weeks, or on the fiftieth day, after Unleavened Bread/Passover. These were the first two of the three classic pilgrim feasts of the Israelite religion. In the larger sweep of the narrative, the Moses connection is evident in that Jesus ascends with a cloud (Ex 1:9) and then mediates the gift of the word of God for his people (Ex 2:4, 11, 18, 33). Thus on the feast of the giving of the Law (the privileged communication of God's word) and the forging of the first covenant, the end-time gift of the Holy Spirit comes to bestow the blessings of the new covenant and to enable the new expression of the divine word in the ministry of the apostles.

Now it becomes clear why Luke lists the geographical origins of the Jewish pilgrims. By highlighting this inclusive gathering, Luke proclaims that this assembly is in fact the long-awaited end-time ingathering of Israel. The Pentecostal gift is destined for Jews first, but then for “the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8), “those far off” (Acts 2:39; Is 57:19).



Some hear in Luke's account a reversal of the story of the tower of Babel. Whereas Genesis 11 tells of a sinful people who wish to make a great name for themselves and are scattered in confusion, losing their ability to communicate. Acts 2 tells of a people of many languages, gathered and “confused” (Luke says deliberately) by a new ability to receive communication, and enabled to become a new community as they repent from their sin and call upon the name of the Lord.

The rest of the Acts of the Apostles indicates that empowerment by the Holy Spirit is not simply some kind of “jump start” to get the Church going but the normal way the community expands through its mission outreach. And the reading from Paul's letter to the Christians in Corinth confirms that a local Church is empowered by the Holy Spirit with a diversity of gifts, services, and works (Second Reading). It is to illustrate this empowerment that Paul develops his teaching on Church as Body of Christ. The gifts, in all their diversity, are meant not for competition or self-aggrandizement but to build up that body in love. We read Luke, Paul, and John because we live in the same Church that is pictured in their writings. – Fr. Dennis Hamm, SJ



Are you familiar with the word 'paraclete'? It is a good one to know. *Paraclītus* means "advocate, comforter," borrowed from Greek *paráklētos* "advocate, helper, comforter," an epithet of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John (as John 14:26), "called to one's aid," Maybe we can invite others to an experience of the Paraclete! That is why each parish has an RCIA group – **the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults**. Even before the pandemic, the U.S. Surgeon General reminded us: *Dr. Vivek Murthy released a new Surgeon General Advisory calling attention to the public health crisis of loneliness, isolation, and lack of connection in our country. Even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately half of U.S. adults reported experiencing measurable levels of loneliness. Disconnection fundamentally affects our mental, physical, and societal health. In fact, loneliness and isolation increase the risk for individuals to develop mental health challenges in their lives, and lacking connection can increase the risk for premature death to levels comparable to smoking daily.*

As we take up the mission of Jesus and are guided by the Spirit, perhaps you know someone who needs to explore our faith or come back to a more active faith. If you do, let Fr. Samide know as he guides our RCIA ministry at St. Angela Merici! There are many folks out there who need to complete their initiation or begin it. This is the journey of faith that has been missioned to us and to every generation. Now some more thoughts about Pentecost and the Paraclete:



WHERE GOD SENDS THE SPIRIT: Texts: Acts 2: 1-11; Psalm 104, First Corinthians, and John 20:19-23

Charles Hazelwood, a courageous and determined conductor in the UK, has revolutionized the concept of an orchestra. He leads the "Para-orchestra," a unique blend of musicians, forty of whom have disabilities. Their perceived limitations become the source of their strength. Because people with disabilities often need others to help them, the orchestra prides itself on teamwork. Before Hazelwood pioneered this group, he had to overcome his lack of confidence.

According to an interview, Hazelwood said, when he was a young conductor performing Mozart in his early 30s: "I was a mess; my hands were shaking, my heart smashing in my chest, and I worried my sweats of anxiety would leak through my jacket. But as the music swelled, those 40 individuals came together in perfect synergy. Through the sublime drama of this symphony, they trusted and listened to each other. I took a breath and soaked this up."



Hazelwood was not the first leader who lacked confidence in himself. In the Book of Acts and the Gospel of John, the disciples, too, are in a time of transition and deeply afraid. In these early stages, presumably when the disciples were not yet 30, the

Church was still forming. God must work among the people to empower them for the work ahead. So before God sends the Spirit out, he first sends the Spirit into and among the very people who prayed for the Spirit.

In the Psalm reading for today, we notice a cry from the people, “Lord, send your Spirit, renew the face of the earth.” By implication, we assume that the Psalmist wants the Spirit to travel across the world so that all creation can be renewed. But where will he send the Spirit on the day of Pentecost? Ironically, before the Spirit travels “out there,” the first stop the Spirit makes is to those “in here.”



Why does the Church get priority? Notice the disciples’ emotional state in Acts and John. Like the young Charles Hazelwood, John indicates that the Church is afraid. Acts relates that the Church is in a transition. They have appointed Matthias to replace Judas, but they are still confused. So many people have gathered from other nations that they cannot understand one another’s languages. Even Paul suggests in his Letter to the Corinthians that their differences under the law are so significant there is no way this cross-section of people could ever seem to work together. They are divided.

These are not the bold disciples appearing before the Sanhedrin or the traveling Paul we meet in the Book of Acts. They are afraid. The first and most important work that the Spirit must do is to bring the early community of believers together in a bond of trust, forgiveness, peace, unity, and confidence.

Notice how that happens miraculously. Jesus appears personally to the disciples behind locked doors. He replaces their fear with the Spirit’s forgiveness. He meets them where they are the most vulnerable – afraid and ashamed — and forgives them for abandoning him. He erases their sins from the heavenly ‘scoreboard’ and releases them from any debts of the past. Jesus breathes on them just as God breathed into the nostrils of Adam in Genesis 2. He breathes the creative winds of the Spirit’s forgiveness into failed disciples (John 20:22).



In Acts, when God sends the Spirit, they can understand what is being spoken. Acts 2:8 and 11 repeat this theme of understanding twice. Pentecost celebrates the birth of the Church community and the experience of deciphering the languages spoken at the festival.

Once they have received forgiveness and understanding, the Spirit enables them to serve each other. Notice what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12. The differences they once had before they were in Christ now become gifts to be used in the Body of Christ. Through the power of the Spirit, they are united in a bond of membership. The Spirit re-members what had been torn apart by the world and reunites them through the Spirit’s power.

Emboldened by the Spirit, Jesus commissions the disciples to share what has been given to them. “Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained” (John 20:23). He sends his disciples to do for others what the Spirit did for the community. “You don’t have to keep score any longer. Erase the faults of others. When you release others from remembering the past, you release the power of the Spirit into their lives.”



On Pentecost Sunday, where would you like to send the Spirit? Many places in our world desperately need the Spirit’s winds. But before we focus on what the Spirit is doing out there, what would you allow the Spirit to do in here?

What happens when we are willing to receive the Spirit’s breath into our lungs?

Miraculously, the Spirit replaces our fear with the assurance of Christ’s forgiveness. The Spirit enables us to take the time to listen deeply and understand one another across generations and cultures. The Spirit gives us the strength to unite, to treat our differences as gifts, and to be used as members of the body of Christ.

If by chance we may not be ready for that kind of experience, sometimes the Spirit surprises us and makes it possible.

Inside on special church in the Holy Land, the acoustics are so good even the most tone-deaf person can sound like a world-class musician. Groups from around the world will visit that church simultaneously. Someone will start a hymn and sing a cappella. Others who know the tune but speak a different language will sing in their native tongue. *The music unites them across languages and cultures.* And so a miniature version of Pentecost breaks out. They understand each other through the breath from their lungs, the power of music, and the bond of the Spirit. What would it take for us to hear the music again and to trust the breath of the Spirit? If we do, our life will be transformed. “Come, Holy Spirit, and enkindle in us the fire of Your love.”

Our Holy Father reminds us this week about the theological virtue of hope, a gift from God. Here is his latest catechesis about virtue:



Cycle of Catechesis on Vices and Virtues: Hope

Dear brothers and sisters! In the last catechesis we began to reflect on the theological virtues.

There are three of them: faith, hope and charity. Last time, we reflected on faith. Now it is the turn of hope. “Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ’s promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1817*). These words confirm to us that hope is the answer offered to our heart, when the absolute question arises in us: “What will become of me? What is the purpose of the journey? What is the destiny of the world?”.

We all realize that a negative answer to these questions produces sadness. If there is no meaning to the journey of life, if at the beginning and the end there is nothing, then we ask ourselves why we should walk: hence man's desperation, the sensation of the pointlessness of everything, is born. And many may rebel: "I have striven to be virtuous, to be prudent, just, strong, temperate. I have also been a man or woman of faith.... What was the use of my fight, if it all ends here?". If hope is missing, all the other virtues risk crumbling and ending up as ashes. If no reliable tomorrow, no bright horizon, were to exist, one would only have to conclude that virtue is a futile effort. "Only when the future is certain as a positive reality does it become possible to live the present as well" said Benedict XVI (*Encyclical Letter Spe salvi*, 2).



Christians have hope not through their own merit. If they believe in the future, it is because Christ died and rose again and gave us His Spirit. "Redemption is offered to us in the sense that we have been given hope, trustworthy hope, by virtue of which we can face our present" (ibid., 1). In this sense, once again, we say that hope is a theological virtue: it does not emanate from us, it is not an obstinacy we want to convince ourselves of, but it is a gift that comes directly from God.

To many doubting Christians, who had not been completely born again to hope, the Apostle Paul sets before them the new logic of the Christian experience, and he says: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied" (1 Cor 15:17-19). It is as if he said: if you believe in the resurrection of Christ, then you know with certainty that no defeat and no death is forever. But if you do not believe in the resurrection of Christ, then everything becomes hollow, even the preaching of the Apostles.



Hope is a virtue against which we sin often: in our bad nostalgia, in our melancholy, when we think that the happiness of the past is buried forever. We sin against hope when we become despondent over our sins, forgetting that God is merciful and greater than our heart. And let us not forget this, brothers and sisters: God forgives everything, God forgives always. We are the ones who tire of asking for forgiveness. But let us not forget this truth: God forgives everything, God forgives always. We sin against hope when we become despondent over our sins; we sin against hope when the autumn in us cancels out the spring; when God's love ceases to be an eternal fire and we do not have the courage to make decisions that commit us for a lifetime.

The world today is in great need of this Christian virtue! The world needs hope, just as it needs patience, a virtue that walks in close contact with hope. Patient men are weavers of goodness. They stubbornly desire peace, and even if some of them are hasty and would like everything, and straight away, patience is capable of waiting. Even when around us many have succumbed to disillusionment, those who are inspired by hope and are patient are able to get through the darkest of nights. Hope and patience go together.



Hope is the virtue of those who are young at heart; and here age does not count.

Because there are also the elderly with eyes full of light, who live permanently striving towards the future. Think of the two great elderly people of the Gospel, Simeon and Anna: they never tired of waiting and they saw the last stretch of their earthly journey blessed by the encounter with the Messiah, whom they recognized in Jesus, brought to the Temple by His parents. What grace if it were like that for all of us! If after a long pilgrimage, setting down our saddlebags and staff, our heart were filled with a joy never before felt, and we, too, could exclaim the Canticle *Nunc Dimittis* prayed every night: "*Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace / according to thy word; / for mine eyes have seen thy salvation / which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, / a light for revelation to the Gentiles, / and for glory to thy people Israel*" (Lk 2:29-32).

Brothers and sisters, let us go ahead and ask for the grace to have hope – hope with patience. Always look towards that definitive encounter; always look to see that the Lord is always near us, that death will never, never be victorious. Let us go ahead and ask the Lord to give us this great virtue of hope, accompanied by patience. Thank you.



**Thank you, Holy Father! We pray for you each day and at each Eucharist!
Oremus pro invicem. Soli Deo Gloria.**

Fr. Michael J. Lanning