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A horizon of hope

Un horizonte de esperanza

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Abstract

This article addresses the theological virtue of hope in the context of the 2025 Jubilee convoked by Pope Francis. It analyzes the need to live in hope in our current context, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. It considers the experience of hope in some key figures in the history of salvation and the emphasis placed on it by Pope Francis in his bull of indiction of the Jubilee. Christian hope, anchored in the Resurrection of Christ and nourished by faith and charity, is a dynamic force and an imperative for his disciples today.

Key words

Hope – pandemic – Kingdom of God

Resumen

El artículo aborda la virtud teológica de la esperanza en el contexto del Jubileo 2025 convocado por el Papa Francisco. Se analiza la necesidad de vivir en esperanza en la realidad actual, especialmente a la luz de la pandemia de COVID-19. Se considera la vivencia de la esperanza en algunas figuras claves en la historia de la salvación, y los acentos dados por el Papa Francisco en su bula de convocación del Jubileo. La esperanza

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cristiana, anclada en la Resurrección de Cristo y nutrida por la fe y la caridad, es fuerza dinámica e imperativo para sus discípulos y discípulas hoy.

Palabras clave

Esperanza – pandemia – Reino de Dios

Living in the third decade of the twenty-first century involves many challenges. We experience significant piecemeal wars in different parts of the world. We have seen the rise of autocratic leaders in countries not only of the developing south but also of the northern hemispheres. Vast numbers of migrants continue to walk many miles or risk dangerous sea crossings to reach lands that they believe will provide them with a better possibility of life; while significant numbers of residents of these lands have turned against what they regard as interlopers. Social injustice and broken relationships prevail in our cultures and violence on our city streets. Fears surround the possibilities of an unbridled use of artificial intelligence that may undermine the dignity of the human person. Suffering, both individual and communal, fails to elicit compassion and depression and other mental health conditions overwhelm our health systems. Yet amidst all this darkness Pope Francis has designated hope as the central message of the Jubilee of 2025. In addition, millions of people around the world are aligning themselves as pilgrims of hope in their own local circumstances as well as those who make the major or minor trek to the eternal city. Is Pope Francis living on another planet?

This reflection aims to respond to that question why? What is it about hope that is so important to recall during these days, weeks and months of 2025? After a brief introduction there are three sections. The first digs a little deeper into our contemporary context to see more acutely where we need hope. The second draws from the scriptures and then focuses on the way in which Jesus brought hope in his very person. Here, I am particularly indebted to Fr. Alban McCoy whose homilies I listened to when at St Edmunds Cambridge UK. The final section looks at what Pope Francis is offering in the way of hope and what our response can be as pilgrims of hope within the Church and the world today.

Introduction

“Hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (Rom 5:5) This was the favourite scriptural citation of the Canadian Jesuit theologian Bernard Lonergan. It situates the theological virtue of hope alongside that of love and implicitly the virtue of faith. It is the love of God at work within us that renders inwardly and outwardly the work of hope in us. Indeed in 1 Cor 13 and the great discourse of Paul on love, he comes back to link all three theological virtues at the end of the passage (1 Cor 13:13). Indeed many biblical texts list the order of faith, hope and love, so that hope appears to be the intermediate virtue. I am reminded of Péguy’s work *The portal of the mystery of hope* where the little girl Hope, whom one rarely notices, seems to toddle along between her big sisters, Faith and Love, but in reality she is the one who carries them all. “Faith sees only what is, but she, she sees what will be. Charity loves only what is. But she, she loves what will be. And the two older ones don’t walk except for the youngest”².

Accordingly, hope appears to constitute the dynamic element of Christian existence. At the same time hope always presupposes faith. Indeed, faith itself is the “assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not [yet] seen” (Heb 11:1)³. Hope also mediates between faith and love as the movement that hope enkindles in faith presses forward to love. For ultimately, the love revealed in Christ is the only reason to live by faith alone, and Christian love is primarily love of Christ and through him the whole Trinity.

1. Our contemporary context

Central to our lived experience of the pandemic of 2019 into 2023 and beyond, has been the revelation of vulnerability, fragility and the need for a robust consideration of the “common good”. Vast swathes of the most specifically vulnerable populations – particularly the elderly and infirm – were ravaged in the early months of the pandemic. In addition, the ethnic susceptibility of some to the virus devastated certain marginal communities⁴. None of us have escaped

² Charles Péguy, *The portal of the mystery of hope* (London: Continuum, 2005), 9.

³ And, as Paul reminds us, the great patriarch Abraham who “in hope believed against hope” (Rom 4:18).

⁴ Patricia Irizar et al, “Ethnic inequalities in COVID-19 infection, hospitalisation, intensive care admission, and death: a global systematic review and meta-analysis of over 200 million study participants”, *The Lancet* **57**, 101877 March 2023.

the fear associated with the recognition of our own profound vulnerability. The poorest and the weakest worldwide were, and are, those most at risk of contracting the virus and dying and also the least likely to receive medical protection and prevention in the form of vaccine provision⁵. Our common humanity was revealed during this time of pandemic, as Pope Francis stated: “Our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people, people often overlooked. People who do not appear in newspaper and magazine headlines, or on the latest television storekeepers and supermarket workers, cleaning personnel, caregivers, transport workers, men and women working to provide essential services and public safety, volunteers”. These were the people Pope Francis insisted who “understand that no one is saved alone ... How many people daily exercise patience and offer hope, taking care to spread not panic, but shared responsibility”⁶.

This awareness of a common humanity also brought forth in all sections of society actions of real fraternity and heroism. An example would be the dedication and determination of health care workers world-wide to the needs of their patients many of whom were frail and elderly unable to be visited by their families. Alongside the normal stress of their work for these health care workers was the trauma of the escalating numbers of dying patients. In addition the limited numbers of personal protective equipment available to them exacerbated stress. The physical and mental toll for many health workers was unprecedented. Many health care workers on the front lines lost their lives, while others lost friends and colleagues.

There were alongside these actions of such dedicated commitment, other actions that revealed self-indulgence and moral turpitude. The so-called “partygate” scandal in the UK would be exemplary of such behaviour. Despite clear Covid lockdown laws, Government ministers, and notoriously the Prime Minister of the day, engaged in parties in No. 10 Downing Street both in the garden and at other times indoors. At a time when members of the public were unable to attend their dying relatives and when the Queen sat alone at the funeral of her husband Prince Philip, this behaviour when later publicised resulted in a public backlash and the eventual resignation of the Prime Minister.

⁵ Matthew Kavanagh et al., “Sharing technology and vaccine doses to address global vaccine inequity and end the COVID-19 pandemic”, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2781756>.

⁶ Francis, “Meditation in the time of pandemic” (8 December 2020).

The havoc sown in our cognitive understanding by the rapid spread of and effects of the Covid 19 pandemic affected the mental health of all people. It also disrupted the norms of our dependencies. If microbes could have such a devastating effect worldwide – an effect not seen in such destructive detail since the outbreak of the Spanish flu following the first world war – then the parameters of our certainties were indeed shaken. In the face of such uncertainty, the invitation from Pope Francis was to engage with our deepest desires, which in turn would lead us to a deeper engagement with reality – a reality that differed from the illusory autonomy that much of western culture extolled and cultivated. In a world that saw us compulsorily exiled from one another in different forms of mandatory lockdowns, that had the potential to increase family intimacy, but also for children the potentially harmful effect of being confined within abusive situations⁷, we came once more to yearn for and reclaim the value of good relationship. We began to utilize different forms of media to sustain relationship, and with the lifting of lockdowns and the widespread vaccination programmes, we began to celebrate once more the joy of in-person gatherings. Children born during these difficult years had to learn afresh that wearing a mask was not a normal part of life but rather something to be adopted if “danger” related to some air-borne bacteria threatened.

Cognizance of our fragility and the need for our common perception and engagement in any policy concerning our human flourishing, however, has been somewhat short-lived. Following the vaccination programmes and the diminishment in virulence of the virus, particularly in the west, there has been a stress on returning to “normal life” without a reflection on the ongoing effects of the pandemic and the lessons that were learned and need to be carried into the coming years. The “pace” of life, in the western world, has not diminished but rather increased in an almost frenetic bid to recover “lost” time. The challenge to engage at a deeper level with our common humanity has been taken up by few amidst the ongoing pressures of life.

⁷ Hyun Lee y Eunkyoung Kim, “Global prevalence of physical and psychological child abuse during COVID-19. A systematic review and meta-analysis”, *Child abuse & neglect* 135, January 2023.

2. Re-appropriating hope from the Scriptures

The word “hope” is mentioned a significant number of times in the scriptures. Depending upon your translation it is mentioned 143 times in the new King James Version and 167 time in the New International Version. Accordingly, it is a word of substantial proportion. The majority of occurrences in the scriptures occur within the New Testament. The prophecies of the Hebrew Bible culminate for Christians in the incarnation of the Word made flesh in the person of the child Jesus. Children are particular signs of hope across the Scriptures, from the promise to Abraham for Isaac his son and the generations that would follow through the granting of a child to the barren Hannah and ultimately to the pregnancy of Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, and Mary, mother of God. A child brings the promise of hope for the new life that has been engendered and the future that is envisioned in and through the child.

In the account of the Visitation in Luke’s gospel (Lk 1:39-45) we see the meeting between Mary and Elizabeth. Perhaps this is the only episode in the whole of the New Testament where two women take centre stage and both are pregnant. Not only this, but both pregnancies are unusual: Elizabeth’s is unexpected at her age, and Mary’s is inexplicable as a virgin. Accordingly, there is a certain miraculous nature to these births indicative of a new world in which fruitfulness will depend not on material advantage – neither mother had the advantage of wealth – but on hope in the power of God’s gratuitous generosity, at work at all times in us and all his creation.

By every worldly measure, legal, social, economic, Mary was a nonentity. Yet, it was she who was enabled by grace to do what no other human being had done before or since. Without the benefit of knowledge, understanding or preparation, she put her entire being at her Creator’s disposal, consenting to play a unique role, not merely passively, but actively and courageously in God’s giving of himself to us in our own flesh and blood. So the climax of the history of the people of Israel and the fulfilment of their hope is brought about through a pregnancy outside wedlock and is conditional on the free consent of an unknown, unmarried young Jewish woman. God’s saving intervention hangs on the consent of a human being, whom he himself created, a female human being.

I imagine that nothing is more intimate, quite literally, to a human being than the carrying of a child, and nothing is more life-changing than the birth of a first child. Surely Mary, like any mother-to-be, spent much of her pregnancy wondering about the child, whom she knows long before anybody else, wondering about what he will be like, what difference his life would make to her life and that of Joseph and what difference he would make to the world. Babies are perforce weak and vulnerable, and in that way they have the capacity to evoke in us an unequalled tenderness and compassion. If God chose to come among us in this way, perhaps it was to make himself irresistible to us.

At Christmas we celebrate the particularity of Christ's birth as an individual human being in a specific time and place. Shortly thereafter, we celebrate the feast of the Epiphany that emphasizes the fact that the coming of Christ reaches across the whole of creation, beyond every parameter of culture, race or religious identity. The revelation of Christ to the wise men from the East affirms the hope that Christ came to save all humankind, without exception. The Epiphany is therefore a feast of hope. It proclaims that there is no longer any doubt about how the drama of existence will end. No matter how tragic, or just trying, our lives may be, no matter what cataclysms the world may face, the Epiphany declares that the purpose of creation is benign, because divinely ordained. God has not only given us his word: he has become flesh in his Word. We can be confident in this hope as Paul reminds us that "all things work together for the good of those who love God" (Rom 8:28). Living in this hope we can live generously and selflessly, in the knowledge that kindness is infinitely more precious than cleverness.

And what of that other child, born to Elizabeth, John the Baptist? He grew to manhood and adopted a counter-cultural way of life dressing in camel hair and feeding on a frugal (if protein rich) diet of locusts and honey. His consistent proclamation was of the imminence of the Kingdom of God. He was a threat to the vain lustful despot Herod, who wanted to establish his own dynastic kingdom. Herod was certainly not going to let this desert dwelling, sartorially challenged eccentric that was the Baptist get in his way – he had him killed.

John's proclamation of the Kingdom of God was firmly in the tradition of the prophets of Israel who spoke of a day when there would be freedom for all

God's people. At that time the outcasts, downtrodden and all those excluded from society would return and be welcomed. Luke's gospel makes clear that all these prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus. In him God's Kingdom was seen to be radically incompatible with the kingdoms of this world, including self-aggrandizing kings such as Herod and every self-serving dictator throughout generations, anyone who attempted to maintain peace and control through an iron fist and a brutal rule. In contrast, Paul promises a different kind of peace. God's peace is the only genuine and reliable guarantee of security in mind and heart, a true lasting peace "which passes all understanding" (Phil 4:7).

It was the hope of this peace rooted in the love of God that Jesus came to bring. His miracles of healing restored a fullness of life to individuals. But more importantly they brought a fresh interior vision of reality. Those whose sins were forgiven by him with a physical healing that gave added significance to the interior reality, knew themselves to have been restored to a wholeness of life and relationship with God that was beyond their wildest dreams. Those who ate with Jesus, the outcasts and sinners, knew themselves to be renewed in their dignity and value as human persons. Lives were transformed by his presence amongst them. His teaching was simple in the way he made known the love of God calling all to a reformation of life and a renewed relationship with his heavenly Father, the one who loved them in a manner beyond all imagining. His call to love one another as he loved was addressed not just to the apostles but to all disciples in every age.

God's Kingdom of peace and justice is not merely a future hope but a reality dawning even now. It is a present hope. I suggest that we must not let the seemingly intractable difficulties of the big picture in our world distract or discourage us from doing what we ourselves can do personally to make the Kingdom of God a reality in our homes, our workplaces and in the myriad encounters of everyday life. The smallest kindness and briefest courtesy colour and season life around us just as even small-scale, hardly noticeable injustices sour the whole of society. We play our roles in this dawning hope and peace if we do our part to make them real amongst ourselves here and now.

The one who hopes lives differently. Hope was a distinguishing mark of the first Christians, who knew that they had a future. They did not know the details

of what awaited them, but they realized that life would not end in emptiness and therefore there was a source of joy and hope in the present. They saw themselves as called to live out the great affirmation of faith made by Paul in the letter to the Romans when he stated: “I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38-39).

3. The call of Pope Francis

Spes non confundit, hope does not disappoint (Rom 5:5). With this reference Pope Francis began his Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the year 2025⁸. Though these words were originally applied by St. Paul to the Christians in Rome, the Holy Father emphasizes their importance for the Jubilee of 2025. Knowing that hope is a keynote for human persons who desire and look forward in expectation to good things to come, despite whatever present difficulties may exist, Pope Francis sees our contemporary context as one wherein we need to renew our hope. We can accomplish this, he maintains, because our hope does not reside simply in ourselves and our own possible achievements and attainments. Rather hope is born of the love that God has for each human person. Hope is founded on faith and nurtured by love, and thus it can sustain us through all the trials and vicissitudes of life. Indeed in the darkest moments, when our way is seemingly totally occluded, the practice of patient waiting (SnC 4) can rekindle the light of hope that is the divine light flowing from the cross and resurrection of Christ.

The Holy Father sees the Jubilee year as a time to live moments of greater intensity in our faith, in order to encourage and sustain “hope as a constant companion”. For this to be the case, he has recalled our attention to the importance of reading the signs of the times as the conciliar fathers advocated in *Gaudium et Spes* (GS 4)⁹. In the midst of a world that seems increasingly taken over by violence in speech and action, the Holy Father calls us to recognize the enormous reservoirs of goodness that exist by the grace of God amidst the darkness and which are signs of hope. A primary source of this hope is the graced desire for

⁸ Francis, “*Spes non confundit*. Bull of indiction of the ordinary jubilee of the year 2025” (9 May 2024).

⁹ Second Vatican Council, “*Gaudium et Spes*. The pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world” (7 December 1965).

peace and the working for peace (SnC 8). Such work can involve each believer. Alongside his commitment to peace, Pope Francis has not failed to stress the importance of openness to life. With declining birthrates throughout Europe, the fruitfulness of love that brings forth children is both borne of a hope in the future and it also generates hope.

Pilgrims of hope are also called to pay particular attention to the most needy, and amongst these Pope Francis emphasizes the plight of prisoners. In particular, he urges the Church throughout the world to raise up the living conditions of prisoners and the possibility that in this Jubilee Year there could be acts of clemency that remove numbers of prisoners from incarceration and reintegrate them into society. The pope's compassion goes out to the sick living at home, often alone, and those in hospitals, with a concern that the human dignity of each person always receive true respect. The young – those who are often the very embodiment of hope – also receive Pope Francis' attention. There is a real need to encourage their dreams and aspirations. "Let us draw close to the young, for they are the joy and hope of the Church and of the world!" (SnC 12) Migrants, displaced persons and refugees figure prominently in the considerations of the Holy Father, along with the elderly who can so easily feel lonely and abandoned. The great numbers of poor people are named: those who often lack the essentials of life, they too need a hope that lives can be changed by active compassion and engagement to relieve their suffering. In this regard also Pope Francis proposes to the international community the importance of forgiving the debts of countries that will never be able to repay them.

4. Pope Francis, an exemplar of hope

Amidst the darkness of a world-wide pandemic our faith was sorely tried and our hope was strained. Yet in the rain-soaked St Peter's square, on March 27th 2020 Pope Francis presided over an extraordinary *Urbi et Orbi* moment of prayer from the *Sagrato* of St Peter's Basilica. Walking through the rain, without an umbrella, the figure of Pope Francis was seen by millions, vulnerable and exposed to the elements of that day, but purposefully focused on his mission to convey the loving mercy of God to all who watched that broadcast, through the many forms of media connection. It was both a universal acknowledgement of fragility and a reconciling moment of hope.

He took for his text the storm on the sea of Galilee when Jesus is asleep in the boat and the disciples awake him fearful that they will all drown (Mk 4, 35-41). Pope Francis said of the storm that it “exposes our vulnerability and uncovers those false and superfluous certainties around which we have constructed our daily schedules, our projects, our habits and priorities”. The Pope drew the attention of his listeners to the fact that the pandemic, like the storm at sea, had uncovered our belonging as brothers and sisters of the one Father. “We have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other. On this boat... are all of us”. Indeed, Pope Francis insisted that there is a blessed “common belonging of which we cannot be deprived”, namely our belonging as brothers and sisters. Our human kinship becomes ever more evident in considering the incarnation, life, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For we are a people redeemed by the cross of Christ, where no one comes to that time of salvation alone – such an understanding lies at the heart of the Christian faith and therefore is central to the hope that sustains Christians¹⁰.

In the message of Pope Francis for World Mission Day 2025, he insisted that the fundamental vocation for all the baptized is to follow in the footsteps of Christ by being “messengers and builders of hope”. His insistence is all the greater as he sees that the Church “is sent to revive hope in a world over which dark shadows loom”. Seeing Jesus as the “divine Missionary of hope”, Pope Francis calls upon the example he gave of going about and doing good to all and restoring hope to those most in need. This example, he asserts, needs to be actively and not passively received. Accordingly, “through his disciples, sent to all peoples and mystically accompanied by him, the Lord Jesus continues his ministry of hope for humanity”¹¹. In following this way members of the Church can truly become bearers of hope to others, thus fulfilling the assertion of *Gaudium et Spes* that “the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts” (GS 1). In a world where, in our

¹⁰ Francis, “*Urbi et Orbi*. Extraordinary moment of prayer presided over by Pope Francis” (27 March 2020).

¹¹ Francis, “Message of Pope Francis for World Mission Day 2025. Missionaries of hope among all peoples” (19 October 2025), 1.

technologically more advanced countries, the reality of proximity or being present to one another seems to be disappearing where we are all “interconnected but not related”, this re-appropriation of our common humanity is very important. It is a vital necessity in the strengthening of the bonds in family life. Pope Francis emphasizes that this engagement with others, particularly the poorest and those most in need should be undertaken according to God’s style of acting “with closeness, compassion and tenderness”. Such a style necessitates a personal relationship, and a real attentive presence to the other, and in this exchange “we can offer with simplicity the hope we have received from God”. In so doing we may become “artisans of hope”¹².

The dynamic impetus for our sharing of hope is our own relationship with Christ nourished and strengthened by prayer and the sacraments. It is in this relationship that we are inspired in hope by the Spirit of God. The Holy Father insists that prayer is the primary missionary activity and at the same time “the first strength of hope”¹³. In particular, Pope Francis draws attention to the importance of praying with the Psalms where the psalmist often amidst adversity and in the direst circumstance is able to discern signs of hope. This is an encouragement within our own circumstances to be continually attuned and discerning the signs of hope in our own lives. Faithful prayer enables us to keep alive the “spark of hope lit by God within us, so that it can become a great fire, which enlightens and warms everyone around us, also by those concrete actions and gestures that prayer itself inspires”¹⁴.

5. The anchor of hope

The logo for the Jubilee of 2025 for pilgrims of hope shows a number of figures in a boat where the mast is stylized both as a cross and as an anchor to which the figures are clinging. It is foundational to our Christian hope that we believe in a crucified and risen Lord and that we know that death and hate do not have the final word. Rather, “Christ, risen and glorified, is the wellspring of our hope, and he will not deprive us of the help we need to carry out the mission which he has entrusted to us” (EG 275)¹⁵. God’s Kingdom of peace and justice

¹² Francis, “Message of Pope Francis for World Mission Day 2025”, 3.

¹³ Francis, “Message of Pope Francis for World Mission Day 2025”, 3.

¹⁴ Francis, “Message of Pope Francis for World Mission Day 2025”, 3.

¹⁵ Francis, “*Evangeliî Gaudium*. Apostolic exhortation on the proclamation of the Gospel in today’s world” (24 November 2013).

is not just a future hope, but a reality dawning even now and the contribution of the baptized in moving this forward is vital, even if in the end all will need to be transformed. So our small gestures of friendship, the smile or kind look that we offer, the listening ear or the good deed, these are all important and substantial as a contribution to the Kingdom of God here and now because by the work of the Spirit these small gestures can blossom in the lives of others bearing rich seeds of hope. The image of the anchor reminds us that amidst every difficulty and storm in our lives, we entrust ourselves to the Lord. No storm can prevail over us because we, like the figures on the logo are firmly anchored in “the hope born of grace, which enables us to live in Christ and to overcome sin, fear and death”. (SnC 25)

It is important that we recall the basis of our hope and as the first letter of Peter indicates “the reasons for our hope” (1 Pt 3:15) In the Apostles Creed we affirm our belief in ‘life everlasting’ this is an essential ground for our Christian hope. The conciliar fathers of Vatican II said of hope that “when people are deprived of this divine support and lack hope in eternal life, their dignity is deeply impaired, as may so often be seen today” (GS 21). As baptized members of the Church by virtue of the hope in which we were saved by Christ, we can view the passage of time both in history and in our own historicity with an understanding that life does not end in darkness and death, but moves towards an encounter with the risen Lord of glory. We also affirm a belief in the return of Jesus and we are called to live our lives in expectation of that return.

We have already asserted that the death and resurrection of Jesus is at the heart of our faith and the foundation of our hope. It was out of love for humanity that Jesus experienced the drama of death for each one of us. It was that same divine love of the Father and in the power of the Spirit that raised him on the third day. Our hope acclaims that in facing death, which so often in our world is seen as the end of everything, we have the certainty that, because of the grace of God given to us in baptism, “life is changed, not ended”¹⁶ and death becomes the passage to eternity. Accordingly, Pope Francis calls us to a renewed sense of gratitude for the gift of the new life that is given in baptism, a life that transfigures the drama of death. For after death with Jesus we share eternal life, the infinite love and communion with the Trinity. In this is our true

¹⁶ *Roman Missal*, Preface I for the dead.

joy and happiness the fulfilment of love. The many Christian martyrs across generations of history, even to our present day, also bear witness to the hope of eternal life rooted in the loving communion of Trinitarian life.

6. Mother of hope

Pope Francis raises up what he calls the supreme witness to hope in the mother of God who reveals that hope is not naïve optimism but rather a gift of grace that is available to us through all the vicissitudes of daily life. From the time of the presentation in the temple of the child Jesus, Mary pondered what Simeon had said of him. “This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed, so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too.” (Lk 2:34-35) Her pondering on these words as she watched her child grow through adolescence to manhood enabled her to stand at the foot of the cross witnessing the passion and death of Jesus. In this time of her deepest sorrow, it was also the time when her son gave her into the care of the beloved disciple – John. In so doing Mary was given to the Church as our mother, the mother of hope. As any good mother she comes to our aid in our joys and in our sorrows, and encourages us in our hope to trust every more deeply in her son. The conciliar fathers were so aware of the importance of Mary to the life of the Church that they included a chapter devoted to her within the dogmatic constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, where they stated that Mary is “a sign of certain hope and comfort” (LG 68)¹⁷ for the whole Church.

Conclusion

It is no coincidence that in this Jubilee Year Pope Francis published his autobiography entitled simply *Hope*. He is a man committed to hope in the promises that God has made to humanity in and through the person of Jesus Christ. Within the darkness of this world and the obscurity of contemporary life, he shines a beacon of light reminding us of the need to trust in God’s promises, to recall the merciful love of the Lord, to return to the Father. In his own person he underwrites Paul’s *cri de coeur* that nothing can separate us from the love of God made present in Jesus Christ our Lord. The call to intimate relationship

¹⁷ Second Vatican Council, “*Lumen Gentium*. The dogmatic constitution on the Church” (21 November 1964).

with God and with one another is a life-giving word of hope, for ourselves and all with whom we come into contact. But hope is no easy option. Hope is a double-edged sword. It offers eternal life secure in a loving God, at the same time that it jerks the rug of false security from beneath our feet. It begins in disorientation, often in the face of the collapse of all that is familiar, but it is God's word of hope that speaks within the half-light of our uncertainty. It is a word born in the eager desire of God to share our vulnerability. It finds its fullest expression in the weak gestures of love from a man dying upon a cross. It is sustained in our daily recognition of God's presence among us.

Pope Francis reinforces the words of the psalmist who states: "the Lord is my light and my help, whom shall I fear?" (Ps 27:1) For the one who clings to Christ there is nothing to fear. We still endure trials and temptations. We may crack up now and then but nothing is ultimately destructive, and because of that we can live lives without fear. How many people within our world long to live like that – without fear? The scriptures attest to the faithfulness of God; in Jesus we see the irrevocable commitment of God to each human person. Pope Francis is calling us to remember these things, to draw from our Christian heritage the faith of so many ordinary men and women who in believing bore witness to the hope they held and the love they shared. Now it is our turn, called to provide a witness for our world, a contemporary leaven of authentic hope, so that hope may spread to all who desire to seek it amidst their many troubles. With the psalmist we may then acclaim "Hope in the Lord! Hold firm, take heart and hope in the Lord!" (Ps 27:14).

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