



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 8 May 2024

[Multimedia]

The following text includes parts that were not read out loud, but should be considered as such.

Cycle of Catechesis. Vices and Virtues. 18. *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 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 causes sadness. If there is no meaning to life’s journey, if there is nothing at the beginning and at the end, then we wonder why on earth we should walk: man’s desperation, the sensation of the pointlessness of everything, arises from this. And many may rebel: “I strove to be virtuous, to be prudent, just, strong, temperate. I was a man or woman of faith.... What was the use of my fight, if everything ends here?”. If hope is lacking, all

the other virtues run the risk of crumbling and turning into ashes. If there were no reliable tomorrow, no bright horizon, 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, 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 rather, a gift that comes directly from God.

The Apostle Paul presents the new logic of the Christian experience to the many doubting Christians who had not been completely reborn to hope: “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 had 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 often sin: 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 always forgives. 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 greatly needs patience, a virtue that journeys hand-in-hand with hope. Patient men are weavers of goodness. They stubbornly desire peace, and even if some of them are hasty and would like everything, 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 matter because there are also elderly people whose eyes are filled with 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: “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 towards that definitive encounter; always thinking that the Lord is near us, that death will never ever be victorious. Let us go ahead and ask the Lord to give us this great virtue of hope, accompanied by patience. Thank you.

Special Greetings

I greet all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially those from Cameroon, India, the Philippines and the United States of America. As we prepare to celebrate the Solemnity of the Ascension, I invoke upon you and your families the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, risen and ascended into heaven. May the Lord bless you all!

Today the Church prays the Supplication to Our Lady of the Rosary of Pompeii. I Invite everyone to invoke the intercession of Mary so that the Lord may grant peace to the whole world, especially to dear and martyred Ukraine, to Palestine, Israel and Myanmar. I especially entrust to Our Lady, the young people, the sick, the elderly and newlyweds, who are here today. I exhort everyone to dedicate more time to praying the Holy Rosary throughout this month of May.

I offer my blessing to all of you!

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters, in our continuing catechesis on the theological virtues, we now examine hope, by which we desire the happiness of eternal life. Without hope the life of virtue would seem unobtainable. Christian hope is grounded in the Lord himself who died and rose for us. As his followers we trust in his promises, especially the gift of the Holy Spirit, striving each day to live in a manner worthy of our calling. Patience walks hand-in-hand with hope, providing a steady path forward. When we are accompanied by them on the journey of life, we remember God's mercy and faithful love. This helps us to avoid being held captive by nostalgia for the past, by melancholy or discouragement. With youthful hearts may we, like Simeon and Anna, persevere in hope. The Holy Father will now greet us in Italian.

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