



The Holy See

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GENERAL AUDIENCE

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The second of the seven "Lamps of Sanctification" for Pope John was Hope. Today I will speak to you of this virtue, which is obligatory for every Christian. In his *Paradiso* (cantos 24, 23 and 26), Dante imagined himself taking an examination in Christianity. A magnificent commission was operating. "Do you have faith?" St Peter asks him first. "Do you have hope?" St James continues. "Do you have charity?" St John ends. "Yes", Dante answers, "I have faith, I have hope, I have charity." He proves it and passes with full marks.

I said that hope is obligatory: that does not mean that hope is ugly or hard. On the contrary, anyone who lives it travels in an atmosphere of trust and abandonment, saying with the psalmist: "Lord, you are my rock, my shield, my fortress, my refuge, my lamp, my shepherd, my salvation. Even if an army were to encamp against me, my heart will not fear; and if the battle rises against me, even then I am confident." You will say: is not this psalmist exaggeratedly enthusiastic? Is it possible that things always went right for him? No, they did not always go right. He, too, knows, and says so, that the bad are often fortunate and the good oppressed. He even complained to the Lord about it sometimes; he went so far as to say: "Why are you sleeping, Lord? Why are you silent? Wake up, listen to me, Lord." But his hope remained: firm, unshakeable. To him and to all those who hope can be applied what St Paul said of Abraham: "In hope he believed against hope" (Rom 4: 18).

You will say further: how can this happen? It happens because one is attached to three truths: God is almighty, God loves me immensely, God is faithful to promises. And it is he, the God of mercy, who kindles trust in me; so that I do not feel lonely, or useless, or abandoned, but involved in a destiny of salvation, which will lead to Paradise one day. I mentioned the Psalms. The same certain confidence vibrates in the books of the Saints. I would like you to read a homily delivered

by St Augustine on Easter day about *Alleluja*. We will sing the true *Alleluja*:—he says approximately—in Paradise. That will be the *Alleluja* of full love: this one, now, is the *Alleluja* of starving love, that is, of hope.

Some one will say: what if I am a poor sinner? I reply to him as I replied to an unknown lady, who had confessed to me many years ago. She was discouraged because, she said, she had a stormy life morally. "May I ask you", I said. "how old you are?"

—"Thirty-five".

—"Thirty-five! But you can live for another forty or fifty and do a great deal of good. So, repentant as you are, instead of thinking of the past, project yourself into the future and renew your life. with God's help."

On that occasion I quoted St Francis of Sales, who speaks of "our dear imperfections". I explained: God detests failings because they are failings. On the other hand, however, in a certain sense he loves failings since they give to him an opportunity to show his mercy and to us an opportunity to remain humble and to understand and to sympathize with our neighbour's failings.

Not everyone shares this sympathy of mine for hope. Nietzsche, for example, calls it the "virtue of the weak". According to him, it makes the Christian a useless, separated, resigned person, extraneous to the progress of the world. Others speak of "alienation", which, they say, turns the Christian away from the struggle for human advancement. But "the Christian message", the Council said, "far from deterring men from the task of building up the world ... binds them, rather, to all this by a still more stringent obligation." (*Gaudium et Spes*, 34, cf. nn. 39 and 7 and *Message to the World of the Council Fathers*, 20 October 1962).

In the course of the centuries there have also appeared from time to time affirmations and tendencies of Christians that were too pessimistic with regard to man. But these affirmations were disapproved of by the Church and were forgotten, thanks to a host of joyful and hardworking saints, to Christian humanism, to the ascetic teachers, whom Saint-Beuve called "les doux", and to a comprehensive theology. St Thomas Aquinas, for example, puts among the virtues *jucunditas* or the capacity of changing things heard and seen into a cheerful smile—to the extent and in the way appropriate (cf. 2.2ae, q. 168, a.2). This kind of cheerfulness, I explained to my pupils, was shown by that Irish mason who fell from the scaffolding and broke his legs. He was taken to hospital and the doctor and Sister nurse rushed to him. "Poor thing", the latter said, "you hurt yourself falling." But I the patient said: "Mother, not exactly falling, but reaching the ground I hurt myself."

When St Thomas declared that joking and making people smile was a virtue, he was in agreement with the "glad tidings" preached by Christ, and with the *hilaritas* recommended by St Augustine. He overcame pessimism, clothed Christian life in joy and invited us to keep up our courage also with the healthy, pure joys, which we meet on our way.

When I was a boy, I read something about Andrew Carnegie the Scot, who went to America with his parents and gradually became one of the richest men in the world. He was not a Catholic, but I was struck by the fact that he returned insistently to the simple, true joys of his life. "I was born in poverty", he said, "but I would not exchange the memories of my childhood with those of a millionaire's children. What do they know of family joys, of the sweet figure of a mother who combines the duties of nurse, washerwoman, cook, teacher, angel and saint?" When still very young, he took a job in a Pittsburg mill with 56 miserable lire a month as wages. One evening, instead of giving him his wage at once, the cashier told him to wait. Carnegie was trembling: "Now they'll dismiss me."

On the contrary, after paying the others, the cashier said to him: "Andrew, I've watched your work carefully; I've come to the conclusion that it is worth more than that of the others. I'm raising your wage to 67 lire." Carnegie said many years afterwards, "all my millions put together never gave me the joy of that eleven lire rise."

Certainly, these joys, though good and encouraging, must not be absolutized. They are something, not everything; they serve as a means, they are not the supreme purpose; they do not last for ever, but only for a short time. "Christians", St Paul wrote, "deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away" (cf. 1 Cor 7:31). Christ had already said: "Seek first of all the kingdom of God" (Mt 6:33).

In conclusion, I would like to refer to a hope which is proclaimed Christian by some people, and on the contrary is Christian only up to a certain point. Let me explain. At the Council, I, too, voted for the "Message to the World" of the Council Fathers. In it we said: the principal task of *divinizing* does not exempt the Church from the task of *humanizing*. I voted for *Gaudium et Spes*. I was moved and enthusiastic when *Populorum Progressio* came out. I think that the Magisterium of the Church will never sufficiently insist in presenting and recommending the solution of the great problems of freedom, justice, peace, development; and Catholic laity will never fight sufficiently to solve these problems. It is wrong, on the other hand, to state that political, economic and social liberation coincides with salvation in Jesus Christ, that the *Regnum Dei* is identified with the *Regnum hominis*, that *Ubi Lenin ibi Jerusalem*.

In the last few days the subject "the *future* of hope" has been dealt with at Freiburg, on the eighty-fifth Katholikentag. They were speaking of the "world" to be improved, and the word "future" was right. But if we pass from hope for the "world" to hope for individual souls, then we must speak also of "eternity". On the seashore at Ostia, in a famous conversation, Augustine and Monica, "forgetting the past and turning to the future, asked themselves what eternal life would be" (*Confessions*, I, n. 10). This is Christian hope; this is what Pope John intended and what we intend when we pray, with the catechism: "My God, I hope from your goodness ... eternal life and the necessary graces to deserve it with good works, which I must do and want to do. My God, let me not remain confounded for ever."

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