

Handout on the Virtue of Hope

I. The Virtue of Hope

A. Definition

- a. “a theological virtue infused by God into the will, by which we trust with complete certitude in the attainment of eternal life and the means necessary for reaching it, assisted by the omnipotent help of God” (Royo, 386).
- b. “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. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful." "The Holy Spirit . . . he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life (CCC).”
- c. hope resides in the will

B. Sins against hope

- a. despair
- b. presumption

C. Growth in hope

- a. beginners need to raise their eyes to heaven so as to:
 1. disdain the things of earth
 2. be consoled in midst of labors and sufferings
 3. encouraged in the practice of virtue
- b. Those advanced in the spiritual life need to practice the following:
 1. never be preoccupied with anxious concern for tomorrow
 2. simplify prayer
 3. advance in detachment from all earthly things
 4. advance with great confidence along the path of union with God
- c. Perfect souls will possess the following operations of hope:
 1. universal confidence in God
 - i. Eg. audacity of the saints
 - ii. “hope against hope” (Rom. 4:18)
 - iii. “even should He slay me, yet will I hope in Him” (Job 13:15)
 2. Indestructible peace and serenity
 - i. Cure of Ars when he was unexpectedly slapped, “Friend, the other cheek will be envious”

Texts for Reflection and Meditation

“We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience (Rm 8:22-24).”

“But we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being given up to death for the sake of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Since, then, we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed, therefore I spoke," we too believe and therefore speak, knowing that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and place us with you in his presence. Everything indeed is for you, so that the grace bestowed in abundance on more and more people may cause the thanksgiving to overflow for the glory of God. Therefore, we are not discouraged; rather, although our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to what is seen but to what is unseen; for what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal (2 Cor. 4:7ff)."

"It is not by sidestepping or fleeing from suffering that we are healed, but rather by our capacity for accepting it, maturing through it and finding meaning through union with Christ, who suffered with infinite love. In this context, I would like to quote a passage from a letter written by the Vietnamese martyr Paul Le-Bao-Tinh († 1857) which illustrates this transformation of suffering through the power of hope springing from faith. "I, Paul, in chains for the name of Christ, wish to relate to you the trials besetting me daily, in order that you may be inflamed with love for God and join with me in his praises, for his mercy is forever (Ps 136 [135]). The prison here is a true image of everlasting Hell: to cruel tortures of every kind—shackles, iron chains, manacles—are added hatred, vengeance, calumnies, obscene speech, quarrels, evil acts, swearing, curses, as well as anguish and grief. But the God who once freed the three children from the fiery furnace is with me always; he has delivered me from these tribulations and made them sweet, for his mercy is forever. In the midst of these torments, which usually terrify others, I am, by the grace of God, full of joy and gladness, because I am not alone—Christ is with me ... How am I to bear with the spectacle, as each day I see emperors, mandarins, and their retinue blaspheming your holy name, O Lord, who are enthroned above the Cherubim and Seraphim? (cf. Ps 80:1 [79:2]). Behold, the pagans have trodden your Cross underfoot! Where is your glory? As I see all this, I would, in the ardent love I have for you, prefer to be torn limb from limb and to die as a witness to your love. O Lord, show your power, save me, sustain me, that in my infirmity your power may be shown and may be glorified before the nations ... Beloved brothers, as you hear all these things may you give endless thanks in joy to God, from whom every good proceeds; bless the Lord with me, for his mercy is forever ... I write these things to you in order that your faith and mine may be united. In the midst of this storm I cast my anchor towards the throne of God, the anchor that is the lively hope in my heart." (*Spe Salvi*, no. 37).

"Let us say it once again: the capacity to suffer for the sake of the truth is the measure of humanity. Yet this capacity to suffer depends on the type and extent of the hope that we bear within us and build upon. The saints were able to make the great journey of human existence in the way that Christ had done before them, because they were brimming with great hope (*Spe Salvi*, no. 39)."

Am I a man or woman of hope? When have I had to "hope against hope" like Mary did at the Foot of the Cross? Have I ever experienced the joy of "rejoicing in hope"? How did it affect those around me?

Who has been a witness of hope for me? Have I been encouraged by others in difficult times? Have I encouraged others and been a witness of hope to others? What might I do now to encourage someone?

Have I sinned against hope? How? Have I been presumptuous? Have I committed sins presuming upon the availability of Confession and the mercy of God? Have I been guilty of despair? Is some of my discouragement and/or depression a result of a lack of supernatural hope? What needs to change?

Can I "smile through the tears" and continue to "fall forward" in adversity? Why or why not?

Do I think often of heaven and sigh for it? How does hope in heaven influence my day to day actions? Do I trust in the "grace of the moment" that God will be faithful in giving me now the graces I need?

Do I work out my salvation "with fear and trembling"? Do I fail to take God seriously while taking myself too seriously? How does pride wound hope? What must change now in my attitude? What will I do about it? Begin today to be an Apostle of Hope!

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