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“Nothing Is Ever Lost!”: Class of the Prelate on hope

We share a class given by Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz in Rome in November 2024, in which he reflects on the virtue of hope on the occasion of the Jubilee Year.

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The papal Bull announcing the Jubilee year, published by Pope Francis, opens with Saint Paul's words to the Romans, which also give

the document its title: “Hope does not disappoint” (Rm 5:5), *spes non confundit*. These words hold a very profound meaning. When we possess true hope, it does not fail. We may fail, but hope never does, because God is faithful to his love for us and to his promises.

It is true that, at times, we hope for things that do not materialise. For instance, we may hope for the success of a specific apostolic activity or a particular outcome for a conversation – only to find that the expected fruits do not appear. Does this mean that hope has failed? No, because hope, rooted in God’s love for us, allows us to affirm with confidence, as our Father said, that “nothing is ever lost!” (*The Forge*, no. 278). Whatever we do for God, whatever we undertake in accordance with his will, is always effective, even if we do not see the results immediately. Perhaps we will

see them in another way, at another time, or perhaps we will never see them in this life. The fruit may differ from what we expected. But we can be assured that nothing is lost.

After this brief introduction, this class will essentially consist of re-reading some texts from the Bull convoking the Jubilee year, from the writings of our Father, and, of course, from Sacred Scripture. My aim in reading and briefly commenting on these texts is to help us foster within ourselves the disposition of the soul that enables hope to grow. Supernatural hope is a gift from God; it cannot be attained solely by human effort. However, we can prepare our souls to receive God's gifts, especially faith, hope, and charity.

What is hope?

Hope is a virtue that leads us to trust that we will obtain a future good; one

that is somewhat difficult to achieve but is nonetheless possible. There are three prerequisites: it must pertain to the future, be difficult, and yet be attainable. Hope that fails to meet these criteria would not be hope at all. For instance, I cannot claim to hope to travel to the moon tomorrow; that would be an absurd hope, because it is impossible.

Similarly, desiring something that is not arduous does not qualify as hope: I do not hope, in the strict sense, to be home in three hours. Although nothing is 100% certain, there are things that, humanly speaking, are not strictly the object of hope.

Hope is a fundamental human virtue, because we all hope for something. We always hope that our work will bear fruit, that good will come about, and that evil situations will come to an end. However, as I mentioned at the beginning, hope is also a supernatural, theological virtue.

What does supernatural hope aim for? Eternal life, union with God, salvation, and the immense joy of heaven... This is the ultimate hope. Participating in God's life is a reality that is *possible* to attain because He offers it to us Himself.

In every person's heart dwells natural, human, necessary hope. The Pope writes: "Hope dwells as the desire and expectation of good things to come, despite our not knowing what the future may bring" (*Spes non confundit*, no. 1). Hope may not be for something humanly certain, but neither is it for the impossible: it is an expectation of something good and potentially attainable.

The object of theological hope, which fulfils and elevates natural hope, is salvation: eternal happiness with God. Saint Paul speaks about the hope that is "laid up for us in heaven" (Col 1:5). This hope in the

happiness that awaits us in heaven is linked to faith in God's love for us and in the means He has provided to help us reach heaven: the Eucharist, prayer...

Hope in eternal life is so important that the Council of Trent condemned those who taught that it was wrong to hope for heaven or that we should do good without wanting the reward of heaven. The Council says: "If anyone saith, that the justified sins when he performs good works with a view to an eternal recompense; let him be anathema" (Council of Trent, session VI, canon 31). Hoping for an eternal recompense is not only acceptable; it is something God wants, and it goes together with faith and charity.

The foundation of hope

What is our hope founded on? The answer is simple: faith, as the Letter to the Hebrews asserts: "Faith is the

assurance of things hoped for” (Heb 11:1). What kind of faith is this? It is faith in God’s love for us, a faith that makes hope secure, because it is founded on something unshakable: God’s steadfast love for each one of us.

The Pope writes that “hope is born of love and based on the love springing from the pierced heart of Jesus upon the cross” (*Spes non confundit*, no. 3). He cites Saint Paul’s words: “For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life” (Rom 5:10). Hope springs from the certainty of faith in God’s love for us.

We need to foster this faith in God’s love, which is a specific love, in our lives. His love is not something abstract, for humanity in general; it is personal. He loves each one of us,

now and always. Our Lord looks at us, He is present within us through elevating and sanctifying grace, and He loves us in a very personal way. This love is our strength. It is what enables us to hope in something which, although difficult, is yet possible: that we can become saints. The goal that we are hoping for is definitive, complete union with God.

Hope is indispensable in the spiritual life, in the ascetical struggle, when we need to begin and begin again. Our hope is not founded on our own strength, as if it were a battle that we had to win at all costs, but rather on God's love for us. He knows our weakness and He relies on his infinite power, which is synonymous with his love for us.

It is also important to consider that, in God, knowledge and love are the same thing. He knows us and loves us infinitely. In particular, the spirit

of Opus Dei inspires us to consider that God's love truly makes us his children. Our awareness of divine filiation strengthens our hope, as our Father explains in one of his homilies: "In my case, and I wish the same to happen to you, the certainty I derive from feeling — from knowing — that I am a son of God fills me with real hope which, being a supernatural virtue, adapts to our nature when it is infused in us, and so is also a very human virtue" (*Friends of God*, no. 208).

The supernatural virtue of hope elevates the natural human capacity to hope for what is good, even when it is difficult. Knowing that we are children of God leads us to confident hope in our ultimate goal. The experience of our own shortcomings might lead us to aspire merely to be *saved*, as though salvation were something different from holiness, and to view holiness as an "ascetical

utopia.” But the goal is holiness, and if our lives end without sufficient sanctity, we remain in purgatory until we achieve it. It is difficult to be holy without effort; therefore, the life of sanctification is arduous, but the hope of achieving it becomes possible with the grace of God.

As I just reminded you, using our Father’s words, our hope is characterized by divine filiation. We have an extraordinary reason to hope to be saints, to believe in the efficacy of our lives, and it is that we are beloved daughters and sons of God. We reflect on this often, and we can do so now with the words of Saint John: “We have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us” (1 Jn 4:16). According to the Gospel, the essence of life is to know and believe in God’s love for us, knowing that we are children of God, thanks to His love, and to renew this faith continually.

Faith in God's love leads us to live trusting in his Providence; knowing that we have not been abandoned to the randomness of the world. God does not merely love us greatly but leaves us to fend for ourselves: He loves us and, respecting our freedom, remains with us always. His love is not distant but provident. In his encyclical on hope, *Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict XVI writes that "God is the foundation of hope: not any god, but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in its entirety" (no. 31). Hope is founded on faith in God's concrete love for us. In contrast, in his letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul describes the Gentiles as people "without hope and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12). Hope is based on God, on his concrete and personal love. Although human hopes exist, they are limited to this life and do not extend beyond

it. Without God, one cannot have true hope in something definitive.

Certainty in what God is determined to carry out

Christian hope has a characteristic that seems paradoxical: certainty. Can we be certain of something that is possible, but that is neither immediate nor completely certain? Yes: we have a *sure hope*, based on the will of God, and on the fact that He is faithful to his love for us.

“This is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thess 4:3). This does not only mean that God wants us to be saints, but that He is determined – to put it this way – that we should be saints. God gives us the means (Revelation, the sacraments...) without coercing our freedom; giving us freedom. He also gives us all the necessary grace for us to reach the goal. We have the *sure hope* of reaching the goal, if we desire it,

because grace will not be lacking:
God is faithful.

We see this reflected in Saint Paul's words in the Epistle to the Ephesians: "God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our sins, brought us to life in Christ; through grace, you have been saved. And He raised us up with Him and gave us a place with Him in heaven, in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:4-7). The Apostle does not say, "He *will* give us a place in the heavens", but rather, "He *gave* us a place in the heavens." This strength of hope leads to certainty, without ceasing to be hope.

Our Father wrote: "I am happy because I am certain we will attain Heaven if we remain faithful to the end" (*Friends of God*, no. 208). Although it might seem contradictory to be certain of something that is uncertain, in reality it is not

contradictory. This is the essence of true Christian hope. We are so confident in God's love that we can have a certain and sure hope. This hope overcomes our miseries and defects and leads us to the certainty that, as our Father said, although we will die with defects, we can still be saints because, with our cooperation, our Lord will lead us to a holiness that consists of the fullness of love. The fullness of love is completely compatible with having defects, as long as those defects are neither accepted nor desired, but repeatedly fought against, out of love, even if we never manage to overcome them completely.

Therefore, we are certain of reaching Heaven if we are faithful, if we remain in His love. Moreover, we are assured that we will be faithful if we desire it, if we freely persevere in love, because God's grace will never fail us.

The certainty of the impossible

Christian hope is not an impossible hope, for we count on God's grace. Therefore, in the supernatural realm, whether we think about our personal sanctification or the enduring effectiveness of the apostolic work of Opus Dei – both in our personal lives and in our efforts to carry out Opus Dei – we must bear in mind what our Father said about “the certainty of the impossible” (Letter 29, no. 60). Hope makes it possible to be certain of the impossible.

The certainty of the impossible has to do first of all with becoming saints, because when we experience our weaknesses or our limited capabilities, it may seem impossible for us to achieve sanctity. But we are certain that we can, because we have faith in the love of God, which is the foundation of hope.

We may think of the figure of Abraham, who hoped against all hope, as St. Paul recalls in his Epistle to the Romans. Our Father used to often remember this expression: “hope against all hope.” Again, said in this way, it seems to be a contradiction, but correctly understood, it is the fullness of hope. It means that we can hope even when, humanly speaking, there appears to be no reason to do so.

Christian hope, therefore, has a firm foundation: God’s own promise of union with Him, which is the essence of the glory of heaven. But this hope also finds expression in many aspects of daily life. Apostolic hope is particularly important. As St. Paul writes in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, “Be steadfast (...), knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58). Our Father had the Latin words of this text engraved on the stone lintel of a

door in the Villa Vecchia in Rome:
Semper scientes quod labor vester non est inanis in Domino. Nothing we do is in vain before God.

In *Spes non confundit*, the Pope invites us to bring hope to others, when he writes, “inclusive attention should also be given to all those in particularly difficult situations, who experience their own weaknesses and limitations” (no. 11). We must bring hope to others, because many people seem to have lost hope. Living without hope, without meaningful goals worth striving for, is paralyzing. We must bring hope to others in the apostolate, in our care for those in the Work whom we support in one way or another. We must be people who bring hope, and focus more on solutions than difficulties. We must be positive, sharers of hope.

We also need to live with hope when facing personal difficulties. We all have difficulties of one kind or another; when we experience our own defects, in our work, our health, all kinds of difficulties. We can and do encounter difficulties in life. In *Spes non confundit*, the Pope cites at length a passage from Romans 8:36–39. St. Paul writes: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or the sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For 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.” It is an extraordinary text, and one to meditate on over and over again in our prayer.

The Pope comments briefly: “Here we see the reason why this hope perseveres in the midst of trials: founded on faith and nurtured by charity, it enables us to press forward in life” (*Spes non confundit*, no. 3). We can carry on no matter what challenges we face. What can separate us from the love of God? Principalities, powers, death, life, the sword, dangers, hunger? No, nothing can separate us, if we don’t want to be separated. Saint Paul tells us that “nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus” (Rm 8:39). Only we can separate ourselves from God’s love. No one else: not the devil, nor illness, nor contradictions, only our own freedom. This is why, in the face of difficulties, we can always have great hope in God’s love, in Christ Jesus.

Where is your hope?

In the same context, it is wonderful to reread the following text from our Father, in the *Instruction for the Work of Saint Raphael*: “Work, full of hope: plant, water, trusting in Him who gives the increase, in God (1 Cor 3:7). And when discouragement comes, if our Lord permits such a temptation; facing seemingly adverse circumstances; when considering, in some cases, the apparent ineffectiveness of your apostolic work of formation; if someone, like Tobias’ father, were to ask you: *Ubi est spes tua?* Where is your hope? ... Lifting up your eyes above the misery of this life, which is not your goal, tell him with that strong and hopeful man of the Old Testament: *quoniam memor fuit Domini in toto corde suo* (Tob 1:13), because he always remembered the Lord and loved Him with all his heart: *filii sanctorum sumus, et vitam illam expectamus, quam Deus daturus est his, qui fidem suam nunquam mutant*

ab eo; we are the children of saints, and we await that life which God will give to those who never abandoned their faith in Him (Tob 2:18)” (*Instruction*, 9-I-1935, cfr. AGP, Biblioteca, P01). Faced with difficulties, we must work filled with hope. We have to plant, trusting in God who gives the increase, not relying on our own efforts, but placing them at the Lord’s service in all the apostolic work. Once again, we know that our hope is based on the certainty of God’s love for us.

Therefore, hope in our self-giving, generously. It is worthwhile to be generous in the apostolate, in all that requires an effort to reach out to others. This includes mortification for our apostolic work, which means dedicating time, overcoming difficulties, etc.

Our Father, while in Venezuela, commented: “I was just

remembering when we began this work so many years ago. I started with three, and now there are so many thousands, hundreds of thousands. But we had hope. It is said that, when Alexander the Great prepared for a battle, he first distributed all his possessions among his captains. And one of them said: 'But, sir, what is left for you?' To which he replied: 'I am left with hope.'" And our Father added: "When I look at you, I too am left with hope." That's how it is. These words can lead us to have hope in others. When you experience your own personal weakness, you can be filled with hope when you look at your sisters. And that hope has to extend to the entire world.

Peace, prayer, joy

The Pope speaks of hoping for peace in the world, a peace that is greatly lacking, and not only because of

major wars – horrific and sorrowful as they are – but also due to the lack of peace in society. As our Father said: “There is no peace in consciences” (*In Dialogue with the Lord*, no. 101). The Pope writes that “the first sign of hope should be the desire for peace in our world, which once more finds itself immersed in the tragedy of war” (*Spes non confundit*, no. 8). We hope that the world will improve, and that is part of our hope in the efficacy of apostolic work. But with realism: we do not know what will happen, and we cannot predict the future.

Indeed, the Book of Revelation and Jesus’ predictions about the end of the world in the Gospel are very dramatic. But this does not rob us of our hope. On the contrary, it encourages us to act so that the little that is in our power, at least, may improve. Reflecting on our world, we can see that some countries are very

de-Christianised. More and more people do not receive the sacraments, although they are Catholics. There are cities in traditionally Christian countries, where religious practice used to be widespread, in which only a very small percentage of the population now attends Sunday Mass. And at the same time, there are other places where things are much better. In both types of places, we can be convinced that the people are good. As Don Javier used to say: "There are so many good people in the world!" In many cases, all that is missing is formation. The difficulties we encounter in the apostolic work should never be a reason for discouragement, but rather an opportunity to pray more, to be daring, to get closer to people and help them through friendship and trust. The more challenging the environment, the more the Lord counts on us; not because we are

better, but because He has given us a lot of formation, despite our being so insignificant. Let us, therefore, be strong in hope!

This applies to everything. What hope do we have in prayer? The Lord says, “Ask, and you shall receive” (Jn 16:24). Impressive words! *Ask, and you shall receive*. And it is absolutely true. There are times when we ask and do not receive, but we believe that we have received in another way, or that we did not ask properly. Other times, we ask properly, and we still do not seem to receive. For example, we might pray for a specific apostolic intention or for someone’s cure, and the person does not get better. Does this mean the prayer was in vain? No. Even if we did not obtain what we asked for, that prayer was not ineffective. We can be *certain in hope*, through faith in the Word of God. Nothing is lost.

Finally, hope with joy. “Joyful in hope,” Saint Paul says (Rm 12:12). And this is not some fairytale hope in which everything is perfect; that is why he adds: “cheerful in hope, patient in tribulation, constant in prayer.” Our Father expressed it thus: “Optimistic, cheerful: God is with us! That is why, every day, I am filled with hope.” Optimistic, cheerful, because God is with us. The virtue of hope helps us to see the positive side of things, the beauty of life, because we see the love of God in everything, even when we do not understand. Therefore, when we feel a bit discouraged, pessimistic, or sad, let us react quickly, with a great act of faith, founded on this joyful hope: *today, right now, God is loving me madly*. Each of us must say this, think it, with a deep act of faith. And this raises us up.

Speaking of hope, our thoughts and hearts naturally turn to the Blessed

Virgin, *Spes Nostra*. She is the Mother of hope, who obtains the grace of hope for us from her Son, to have it and to share it, as Saint Peter says: “We must always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Pt 3:15).

I will end with that splendid phrase from Saint Paul: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you abound in hope, by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rm 15:13). I encourage you to read and meditate on it often. Let us be cheerful and, when there are human reasons not to be, let us remember that above every human reason, there is a far greater one, which is the foundation of our hope: God’s love for us.

Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Prelate of Opus Dei

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