

The Fundamental Right to Hope

Pope Francis said in his homily at the Easter Vigil: “Jesus’ hope is different. He plants in our hearts the conviction that God is able to make everything work unto good, because even from the grave he brings life.”

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On the morning of the Resurrection, as the sun began to rise, a great silence must have reigned. A different, expectant silence, as when something marvelous is about to

happen. Time seems to stand still and everyone is quiet, waiting to cry out with a shout of joy.

In recent weeks, many city streets have also been submerged in a strange silence. The constant roar of traffic and honking of horns is missing, as are the voices of people passing by. It is a sad silence, marked by sorrow and suffering. But it is also compatible with hope, as Pope Francis insisted on 3 April: “in the silence of our cities, the Easter Gospel will resound.”[1]

The empty tomb

The Paschal Triduum, which this year we celebrated in such a strange way, doesn’t end on Good Friday, with the stone firmly in place and the entrance to the tomb sealed. The Gospel means “good news,” which is what the holy women brought to the apostles on the third day after Christ’s death: the stone rolled aside,

the announcement of the angels and the empty tomb.[2]

“Christ is alive.’ This is the great truth which fills our faith with meaning. Jesus, who died on the Cross, has risen. He has triumphed over death; he has overcome sorrow, anguish and the power of darkness,”[3] Saint Josemaria said in a homily given on Easter Sunday in 1967. And he continued: “Jesus is the Emmanuel: God with us. His resurrection shows us that God does not abandon his own.”[4]

Surrexit Christus, spes mea! “Christ my hope is arisen,” we pray during the Octave of Easter, in an ancient hymn still in use in the Roman liturgy.[5] As Peter’s successor recently reminded us: “In the risen Jesus, life conquered death. This Paschal faith nourishes our hope.”[6] And turning his thoughts to the difficult trial we are now going

through, he added: “It is the hope of a better time, in which we can be better, finally freed from evil and from this pandemic. It is a hope. Hope does not disappoint. It is not an illusion; it is a hope.”

Another thing to savor

Hope means waiting for something good, something we greatly desire to come about, at times amid great adversity. Hence hope requires patience, which is perhaps one of the virtues most needed during these days of confinement at home.

We have just experienced Holy Week. A well-known baroque artist, Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, produced many paintings of Christ and our Lady. Among these are several “Ecce Homo” representations of Jesus covered with a purple cloak and crowned with thorns. His hands are tied and He holds in his right hand the scepter that the Roman

soldiers have offered Him in mockery, as He looks down at the ground. It is a look of infinite compassion and tenderness, as He silently endures all the insults and ridicule. It is easy to see why many people, when contemplating this representation of our Lord, have referred to it not as “Ecce Homo” but as “the Christ of patience.”

Some of us have spent an entire month unable to leave our homes. And it is only natural that at times we have found it harder to put up with situations or remarks that normally we wouldn’t find especially trying—as well as experiencing the need to be patient with ourselves, which sometimes can be especially difficult. Perhaps what we find most difficult is the uncertain future we now face. In *Furrow*, Saint Josemaria gives us a good solution for any lack of peace in our life: “Here is a remedy for those anxieties of yours.

Be patient, have rectitude of intention and look at things from a supernatural perspective.”^[7]

The Founder of Opus Dei, with his energetic and forceful temperament, often had to learn how to wait. Especially after arriving in Rome to seek the most suitable juridical framework for the Work. In a letter written to his spiritual children in April 1947, he mentions the need to change his plans, much against his own wishes: “The need has arisen for me to remain here a bit longer, something I find quite trying, although I am very happy to be in Rome.”^[8] And he ends with his characteristic sense of humor: “Patience. Another thing to savor.”

Maturing through suffering

With news outlets constantly spreading alarming updates about the COVID-19 pandemic, we may find it hard to see any meaning in this

ongoing tragedy for our loved ones and society as a whole. All of this could lead us to become discouraged. But that would mean losing sight of the valuable teachings this situation offers us. We have to learn to also see the opportunities it contains, just as the good opens up a path for itself even amid calamity.

Jesus' death—the greatest evil ever committed—has borne as its fruit our justification and reconciliation with God, and the hope of eternal life. Christ's Cross has transformed the meaning of human pain and suffering. The stories of solidarity and heroism that we have witnessed these days make this very clear. As Benedict XVI wrote: "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."[9]

Accepting painful and unavoidable situations with a “yes” on our lips is “a path of purification and growth in maturity, a journey of hope.”[10]

The anchor of the soul

Hope is the anchor of the soul.[11] It sustains the longing for happiness placed by God in the human heart. This virtue leads us to put our trust in Christ’s promises and not in our own strength; it protects us from discouragement, upholds us in adversity and expands our heart with the hope of eternal happiness. Buoyed up by hope, we are “preserved from selfishness and led to the happiness that flows from charity.”[12] Hope is a theological virtue that is especially needed now. It enables us to achieve great goals, since with hope we are able to bear the greatest trials and to “surprise” even God.

The early twentieth century French author Charles Peguy, in his reflections on the “mystery” of hope, placed these words on the Creator’s lips: “But hope, says God, that is something that surprises me. Even me. That is surprising. That these poor children see how things are going and believe that tomorrow things will go better. That they see how things are going today and believe that they will go better tomorrow morning. That is surprising and it’s by far the greatest marvel of our grace. And I’m surprised by it myself.”[13]

In the homily he preached at the Easter Vigil, the Pope said: “This year we are experiencing, more than ever, the great silence of Holy Saturday.” Like the holy women at the tomb, we too now face “fear about the future and all that would need to be rebuilt. A painful memory, a hope cut short. For them, as for us, it was the darkest

hour.” [14] But our faith assures us that the silence of the tomb cannot have the final word.

The Holy Father continued: “Tonight we acquire a fundamental right that can never be taken away from us: *the right to hope*. It is a new and living hope that comes from God. It is not mere optimism; it is not a pat on the back or an empty word of encouragement, uttered with an empty smile. No! It is a gift from heaven, which we could not have earned on our own. Over these weeks, we have kept repeating, ‘All will be well,’ clinging to the beauty of our humanity and allowing words of encouragement to rise up from our hearts. But as the days go by and fears grow, even the boldest hope can dissipate. Jesus’ hope is different. He plants in our hearts the conviction that God is able to make everything work unto good, because

even from the grave he brings life.”[15]

To believe “against all hope.”[16]

This is the great lesson that Christ’s resurrection gives us. But hope is never solitary; it is always shared.

[17] We see this in the Gospels. After Christ’s death, the disciples and the holy women are overwhelmed with sorrow, and they seek refuge in the cenacle in Jerusalem, united around our Lady. We go to Mary’s intercession as we begin this season of Easter: “Our Mother, our Hope! How safe and sure we are, closely united to you, even when everything around us is quivering.”[18]

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[1] Video-message of Pope Francis, 3 April 2020.

[13] Charles Peguy, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope* (translated from the French by David L. Schindler, Jr, ISI.

[14] Pope Francis, *Homily*, 11 April 2020.

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] *Rom 4:18.*

[17] Cf. Benedict XVI, Enc. *Spe Salvi*, nos. 13-15.

[18] Saint Josemaria, *The Forge*, no. 474.