**The Year of Jubilee**
**2025**

# PILGRIMS OF HOPE

## A SERIES OF REFLECTIONS ON CHRISTIAN HOPE


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# Introduction

Pope Francis once spoke about the new poverties, "poverties produced by the culture of wellbeing." And in that light he defined the poor today as those who are afraid of the future. All of us are poor because for all of us the future presents with great uncertainty. The world order is changing; decisions are being made by powerful people that will have dramatic consequences for much of the world, including ourselves. The distinctions between truth and falsehood, fact and fiction, have become intentionally blurred so that the masses might not stand in the way of powerful and sinister political and social agendas. We discover ourselves in dangerous times, full of uncertainty and confusion.

And so, we become fearful, afraid of the future. And the more fearful we become our tendency is to close our eyes lest we see too much, to close our ears lest we hear too much, to close our hearts lest we be affected too much. We drift into a living sleep. Fear closes us in, it closes us down, it paralyses us. And yet, the Spirit comes into our lives to transform our fear into its opposite. And the opposite of fear is love. Love opens us up; it opens us out; it awakens us; it opens our eyes, our ears, our hearts. The Spirit leads us out of fear into love. This is the foundational dynamism of the Gospel and of our discipleship of Christ.

And what is the bridge between fear and love? It is hope. Without hope we stay entrapped in our fear. But it is hope that prises open our fear and offers us something more. It offers us a future. As Pope Francis wrote a number of years ago:

> To Christians, the future does have a name, and its name is Hope. Feeling hopeful does not mean to be optimistically naïve and ignore the tragedy humanity is facing. Hope is the virtue of a heart that doesn't lock itself into darkness, that doesn't dwell on the past, does not simply get by in the present, but is able to see a tomorrow.
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> Hope is the door that opens onto the future. Hope is a humble, hidden seed of life that, with time, will develop into a large tree. It is like some invisible yeast that allows the whole dough to grow, that brings flavor to all aspects of life.

Hope then is the affirmation that, whatever of the past, indeed whatever of the present, there is always the possibility of a new beginning. This is why the ancient Church writer, Gregory of Nyssa, could say of the Christian "who climbs never stops going from beginning to beginning, through beginnings that have no end." It was a wonderful affirmation that our faith in the Resurrection of Jesus means that even in the face of all that would suggest its denial, the victory has been won, the force of love is stronger than fear, life is stronger than death. We are people of hope. And because of that hope, we are those who can love rather than being encased by fear.

Yet, hope – beyond mere wishful or positive thinking – comes at a price. Something must die. I have to let go of something. I have to let go of my preference for fear. I have to let go of what I hold in my heart that imprisons me in the past or even in the present. Again, as Pope Francis says in the same address in 2017,

> Even the harsh judgment I hold in my heart against my brother or my sister, the open wound that was never cured, the offense that was never forgiven, the rancor that is only going to hurt me, are all instances of a fight that I carry within me, a flare deep in my heart that needs to be extinguished before it goes up in flames, leaving only ashes behind.

We are conscious of the ashes that we carry – the ash of bitterness, the ash of resentment, the ash of anger, the ash of regret, the ash that seeks vengeance upon someone, the ash of our hurts and failures. For this is our reality. It is our past. Perhaps even our present. But it is not our future.

Notes:

Pope Francis, 30 June 2016.

See Pope Francis, Video Message on the Occasion of the TED conference in Vancouver, Canada (26 April 2017) https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170426_videomessaggio-ted-2017.html

Pope Francis, Video Message on the Occasion of the TED conference in Vancouver, Canada (26 April 2017)

St Gregory of Nyssa, *Hom. in Cant*. 8: PG 44, 941C.

Pope Francis, Video Message on the Occasion of the TED conference in Vancouver, Canada (26 April 2017)

# Hope Expresses our Hunger

The theme of this Year of Jubilee is that of Hope. "Hope does not disappoint" (Rom 5:5) is the scriptural verse chosen to highlight this. What is hope? From where does it arise? Why is it so important in our life of faith? What is its connection to faith and charity? How can we be agents of hope for others? Why is the exercise of hope so important in our world?

Let us begin by focusing on how we might commonly think of hope. What is this thing we call hope? And what is its link to our prayer?

It seems to me that we naturally hope for that which we want but do not have. And this is the way that we most commonly use the word, hope. "I hope that the weather tomorrow will be fine." "I hope that the challenging situation in which I find myself, will work out." "I hope my children will grow to be ok." "I hope I get the job for which I am applying." "I hope I get through what I am facing in one piece." And on the other hand, we talk of a situation as "being hopeless", meaning that we can't possibly see a way through, or we can't see what things might be like on the other side of the mess we are facing. "There's not a hope in hell" we might say, meaning that something we may have considered as a possibility is never going to occur in any circumstance.

In all these situations, we are hoping for something out of a certain lack, a particular absence, a kind of emptiness. Hope fills the void, almost. Its origin is about a certain deprivation; it arises from our neediness. It is indicative of our incompleteness. And, in a certain sense, it relates to where we hunger in our life. In this sense, hope exposes our hunger. The hungers of our heart, of course, are many. They are intimately linked to our needs: our needs for safety and belonging, for affection and relationship, for self-esteem and security. We hunger for love, we hunger for acceptance, we hunger for understanding – and we seek to have this hunger filled in so many ways that in the end cannot achieve for what we most deeply hope. So often we are actually afraid of our hunger. We are afraid of just how intense it is, of seeing it for what it is. And so, we pretend to ourselves and to one another that we are not hungry.

Yet, our hungers are always present with us in one way or another. To be human, is to be hungry: at different times and in different seasons of life, we are hungry physically, emotionally or spiritually.

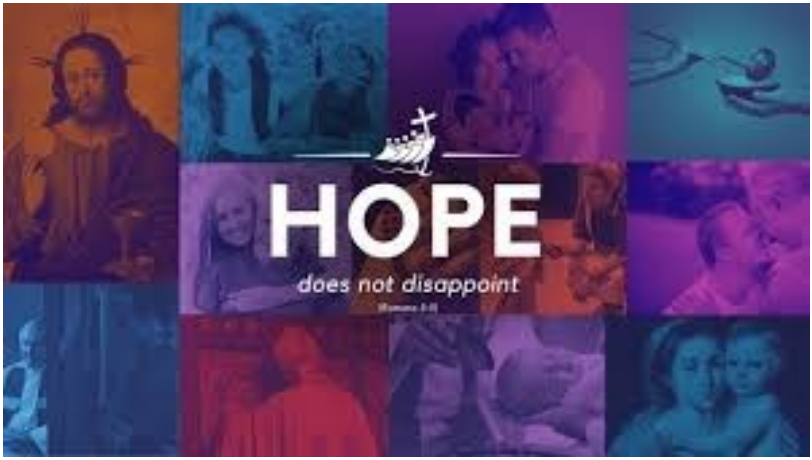
Our hunger gives rise to our hoping. And it is with this hope that we often pray. Our hunger exposes a need in our life, and we pray that the need be met. This is the prayer we commonly refer to as the prayer of intercession. It is the prayer that comes out of the awareness of our hunger on the one hand, and on the other hand, our awareness of our dependency on a Source of life that is bigger than ourselves.

At times, our prayer, full of hope, can be an abdication of what should be our own responsibility, an avoidance of our own legitimate authorship of life. It can be a way of escaping the acceptance that life is unpredictable and, at times, even harsh. We expect God to do what, in fact, God expects of us. Sadly, we often hear the lament, "God never seems to answer my prayers." In other words, my hope never gets realised. I am left where I am, nothing has changed. And we can slide into despair, or resentment or cynicism because our hopes continuously seem thwarted.

Yet, more positively, our prayer of intercession is ultimately a prayer of creative dependency. It affirms to us our creaturehood, that we are not creations of ourselves, but the creations of Someone other than ourselves. And even more, prayer can become the space in which we can allow ourselves simply to be hungry. Our prayer can be the space in which we no longer have to pretend. Lent, especially, is a time for us to be honest about our hungers and to bring those hungers before God. We are invited to become more aware of our cravings, and all the unhelpful ways we seek satisfaction but in a way that simply leaves us hungrier. And then our hope is not simply *for* something. Rather our hope is *about* something. We move away from placing an expectation on God to have our needs met to hoping something about life itself, to opening our hearts to engage with life, to wondering how we can navigate all of life's unpredictability and sometimes its harshness with courage, with creativity, with compassion.

And this shared, common hope can be very powerful. When we come together in our hope, I believe the strength of our bonds has an effect in ways that are not open to rational reflection. And there is also an act of resistance at work here: it is resistance to the forces in our world that run on the illusion of control and total self-determination. Praying together for a certain need, hoping together in our hunger, subverts any complacency of self-sufficiency as it overturns the message that the status quo is the full horizon. As Christians we believe that the status quo is never the full horizon: things do not have to be this way; we can keep moving, keep growing, keep opening out into life. At every Mass, our "Prayer of the Faithful" or "General Intercessions" express this awareness.

And so our shared hope expresses that our God is the God of life who is calling us into richer and more abundant life. It expresses our commitment to struggle through the obstacles to that life, to have those obstacles removed. It gives us the courage needed to keep living and working. To keep loving. It is our hope then that we always break forth from the past and the present into a future.



# Doorway into the Future

The great spiritual writer of the 20th century, the Trappist monk, Thomas Merton once provocatively lamented in his journal, *The Sign of Jonas*, the perpetuation of building churches in a Gothic style as an implicit confession of atheism. He interpreted the practice as a declaration that God is dead, that God no longer belongs to our age, but only to a past one. If God were truly living would not religious architecture draw from the insights and creativity of the current age? He wrote that observation in the 1950s. However, in his very last journals in 1965, *A Vow of Conversation*, Merton continued with this observation by quoting from Simone de Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity*, saying, "[To be free] is to be able to surpass the given toward an open future." To this he made comment, "Simply to enclose oneself 'in the given' is no glory to God. It is an evasion of life and of growth, a hiding your light under a bushel."

Pope Francis once remarked that the poor today are those who are afraid of the future. They are those trapped in the past at worst, or at best, in the present. But for the Christian, the future is given us as a relentless invitation, and not even death negates this. There is always a future, always the possibility of a new beginning. That is not to say that we are not concerned about the future, that the future does not come to greet us with very real questions that can make us anxious at times. It does mean, however, that we are never defined by our concerns. There is something more at work, something bigger at work, something beyond what occupies our attention. In the words of the first President of the Czech Republic, Václav Havel, "hope is not the belief that something has a positive outcome, but the certainty that something makes sense, however, it ends up." Because of what we celebrate each Easter - the triumph of life over death, the victory of presence over absence – hope now is always possible no matter what stone we come across in our path.

All this opens for us a space. It is the space of 'the more.' According to the theologian, Jürgen Moltmann, in "Kabbalistic Jewish tradition one of God's secret names is MAKOM, the wide space." God is this wide-open space in which new and hitherto unsuspected expectations about life are awakened. "You have set my feet in a broad place", as we read in Psalm 31. Similarly, Bishop Paulus Budi Kleden, a former General Superior of the Divine Word Missionaries, preached several years ago, "Hope is open spaces; hope opens up prospects, hope dares the uncertain, and the unknown. Those who hope

We are those, then, who are enabled to stretch out into new horizons, "stretching out to what is ahead, [always with] a readiness for a fresh start." We are not imprisoned in the given. This is the source of Christian possibility and the way that we can enter the marvelous aspiration of the Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard - even if tragically he could not personally realise it: "If I were to wish for something, I would wish not for wealth or power but for the passion of possibility, for the eye, eternally young, eternally ardent, that sees possibility everywhere. Pleasure disappoints; possibility does not."

This, in turn, means we are those who live our life in watchfulness. We are those, in Moltmann's words, who no longer "pray with closed eyes, but [now rather], messianically, with eyes wide open for God's future in the world. Christian faith is not blind trust. It is the wakeful expectation of God which draws us in all our senses." He goes on to illustrate that indeed this was how the first Christians prayed "standing, looking up, with arms outstretched, and eyes wide open, ready to walk or to leap forward." As Moltmann indicates, "We can see this from the pictures in the catacombs in Rome. Their posture reflects tense expectation, not quiet heart searching. It says . . . We are on the watch, in expectation of the One who is coming . . ." And, our watchfulness leads us, as Moltmann suggests, to "expect the presence of God in everything I meet and everything I do. . . What does God have in mind for me? What does God expect of me? What is he saying to me through the things that are happening in my world, and what is my response?" As he remarks, "When we wake up in the morning, we expect a new day; and in the same way, the waking which springs from prayer to God also leads us to the expectation of God in the life we experience. I wake up, and open all my senses for life – for the fulfillments and the disappointments, for what is painful as for what gives joy." At the heart of these expectations lies a hope about the future – that, indeed, there is a future.

The more aware we are aware of the way in which our own hearts and souls are hungry, the more we see and hear, however, the hunger of others. We live into the knowledge that 'hunger and thirst makes friends of us all' to paraphrase John O'Shea. We are united in our hunger, and we express this solidarity whenever we come together to pray for our needs.

When someone falls sick or is in need there is within us an instinctive need to pray for this person. We ask others to pray for us when we are in need or others ask us to pray for them. We join together in hope. Then, we are not hoping individually as persons, we are hoping together as a community.

It is the Spirit, then, who leads us into ever new horizons. It is the Spirit which animates the recognition that things can be different, who informs our dreams and sets ablaze our hope. And when we are able to create even a moment in which people can imagine a better future, when we can transform the absence of hope into the exercise of hope and allow our self and others to dream once again, in some small way we mirror the life of the Resurrection.

As Jürgen Moltmann concludes, "We wait and hasten, we hope and endure, we pray and watch, we are both patient and curious. That makes the Christian life exciting and alive."

Notes:

Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas,* (Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1953), journal entry 20 December 1951.

Thomas Merton, *A Vow of Conversation: Journals 1964-1965*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1988), 24.

See Pope Francis, Video Message on the Occasion of the TED conference in Vancouver, Canada (26 April 2017) https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170426_videomessaggio-ted-2017.html

Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace,* (1986).

Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A universal affirmation*, translated by Margaret Kohl, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 43.

Jürgen Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning: the life of hope,* translated by Margaret Kohl, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 87.

Søren Kierkegaard, "Either/Or, A Fragment of Life," in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press), 45.

Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning*, 83-84.

Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning*, 85.

Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning*, 84-85.

Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning*, 88.

# Christ: The One in whom we Hope

In whom can we place our hope? In other words, who gives us confidence that there is a future? This is where we consider the emergence of messiahs – figures who promise a new age of possibility and opportunity, freedom from the current experience of stagnation or entrapment. Of course, many have assumed this significance in history – individuals with strength of ideology and resources to offer a better future for people. And not, only in history, but in our own time as well – though history itself demonstrates that the hopes and expectations of the people cannot be fulfilled, and the messiah disappears almost as quickly as they appeared.

Indeed, as the Christian people we are heir to those, themselves, who had longed for a Messiah. For centuries, the people of the Old Testament ardently hoped for someone who would deliver them from their oppression and who would re-establish the Kingdom of David, one who would finally give them sovereignty and security.

There comes a time in their history when someone does appear with such a possibility, though not in the way long anticipated. His name is Jesus: born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth, followed in Galilee, and arrested and executed in Jerusalem. Was he, too, like any other messiah whose crusade died as quickly as it emerged?

Yet, for us as the followers of this first century Palestinian rabbi, it was not the end of the story. For his first followers had the audacity to proclaim the astonishing assertion that he was not dead, but alive – that in his death the most remarkable event manifested itself: his Resurrection. Resurrection of course is not resuscitation. We do not believe that Jesus was resuscitated from the dead. We are those who believe, based on those first followers experience, that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. And this is a much more marvelous event than mere resuscitation. It means that the life of Jesus has burst forth from the confines of death and broken the shackles of time and space. It is something present to us now through the body that bears his risen life to us, the Body of his friends together, the Church.

As the people who proclaim these five simple words, “Jesus rose from the dead” – we have staked our life on this claim, for as St Paul wrote to the people of Corinth, “if Christ has not risen from the dead, our faith is in vain.” (1 Cor 15: 12-19).

Indeed, our bold assertion is not simply even a profession about Jesus; it is equally a profession about ourselves. We are those who proclaim that Jesus Christ is the first born from the dead (Col 1:18), the second Adam (1 Cor 15: 45), and in him we see our own destiny: the transformation of our own bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:20). This is our hope – our hope that we will share in the same destiny accomplished in Christ Jesus himself by the power of God who is calling us all into a new existence, a restored world, a world in which alienation has been overcome and communion becomes the new politic. We call it by a simple word, heaven.

And yet we believe that heaven is not simply a future reality. We are those who believe Christ has come, Christ will come, and that Christ is already coming. Subsequently, we are those entrusted to bring heaven to earth, so to speak, through our own commitment to that new order of relationship inaugurated by Jesus which he calls the Kingdom of God. As we hope for this Kingdom, we work for this Kingdom, constantly on the watch for the ways to transform shame into dignity, exclusion into embrace, oppression into freedom. We can do this in grand ways by publicly voicing our opposition to legislation that may be antithetical to the vision of life given us by Jesus, right through to a smile to someone who is distressed.

As followers of Jesus, we are disciples of the Kingdom he preaches. And he teaches us to pray with hearts full of hope for this kingdom. “Our Father who art in heaven . . . thy kingdom come,” we pray constantly. We hope for the Kingdom he has inaugurated. Indeed, at every Mass following the Lord’s Prayer, we pray, “As we await the blessed hope, and the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ.” This we pray with our children every Sunday morning in the Eucharistic Prayer for them: “Jesus now lives with you in glory, but he is also here on earth amongst us, and one day he will come again in glory and then there will be no more suffering, no more tears, no more sadness.” How we long for this world!

Jesus is the one who has opened for us the future through his Resurrection, but not just any future. He has opened for us a very particular future – a new world. And it is this world for which we most deeply hope as his followers. It is this hope that makes us agents of social change in our world today. Why would we be such agents, if we were not those who are living by a hope for a better world?

As Christians, we are a people of both memory and hope. We remember Jesus, his life, his death and resurrection – especially here at the Eucharist. Our memory of him grounds us, it orients us. But it also fills our hearts with hope. Where he has gone before us, we, too, are to follow. A new world, a better world, a different world is possible. Our memory sustains us, but our hope goads us. We do not accept the present but stretch always out into a new future, the future of God's Kingdom.

# Christian Hope—Theological Hope

Our hope as Christians is inextricably built on our faith. We hope because we have faith. We hope because not only do we have a future in Christ, but we hope also because we are those who have a past, a memory. We are those who believe that a promise has been made to us. It was a promise first given by God to his chosen people, the people of the Old Testament. In the covenant that God established with his people, God promises Abraham that he will be the father of a great nation. It is a promise that is continuously re-iterated to those that follow, to Moses, to David, to the prophets (see Gen 12:2-3; 13:15; Ex 6:5-8; Is. 65:17). The people of the Old Testament live in the hope that the promise will be fulfilled. The people live by that hope. And there emerges a very particular school of Jewish spirituality called the *anawim*: they are those who continue to believe in the Promise and live with its hope even in the face of everything that would deny it. And many are the occasions where the Promise seems to have been thwarted. The people are sold into slavery in Egypt, the people are exiled to Babylon, the people are overwhelmed by the Romans. And yet the faithful of Israel, keep believing, keep trusting, keep hoping. At the time of Jesus, the people of Nazareth were immersed into this school – these are the poor of Yahweh who keep their gaze on what is to come even though they live in a situation that would seem to be without hope. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is the most beautiful example of this people, as is Joseph, the shepherds to whom the birth of Jesus is announced, and Anna and Simeon the two figures in the Temple of Jerusalem about whom we read in the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke.

The *anawim* had as their prayer book the Book of Psalms. It is the prayer book, *par excellence*, of hope. In this liturgy of hope, we touch upon what Johannes Metz terms that "mysticism of suffering unto God." We cry out to God in the midst of our suffering with its full force, and yet at the same time believing. This is the prayer of Jesus himself on the Cross, the One who in the midst of his agony can cry out, "My God, my God why have you abandoned me", and yet surrender in trust, "Into your hands I commend my spirit" and who thus opens for our world the imagined possibility of a life stronger than death.

Each of us is drawn into that awful moment of Jesus. We too are called to hope in the midst of darkness because we believe, like Jesus, that God will be true to his Promise, that in the end the Promise will be fulfilled, even though everything seems to announce the opposite. Christian hope breathes on the irrevocable nature of this Promise. It is the confidence (faith) that the Promise we have been given in Christ's Resurrection cannot be forever frustrated. We are those who believe that Christ has risen from the dead, that the victory has been won, that the force of death has been overcome, that goodness is stronger than evil. We stake our lives on this conviction. We live by the words of St Paul:

> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor power, 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. (Rom 8: 35-39)

And this changes the way in which we see our life and changes the way in which we do things. It is the faith that opens for us new possibility even in the midst of what might be extraordinary limitation and before what at first might seem hopeless. The Promise we have been given, and the hope that springs ever new from this faith, enables us to celebrate even in the face of frustration, distortion or limitation.

This, then, is the paradox of genuine Christian hope. It is most keenly experienced in the face of all that would seem to deny it. Christian hope, therefore, is exercised precisely in the midst of evil: it is the projection of the Promise, given and received, over the absurdity of evil. St. Paul put it this way, "Affliction makes for endurance, and endurance for tested virtue, and tested virtue for hope. And this hope will not leave us disappointed" (Rom 5:3-5).

Let me give an example of what I mean by this. Many years ago, I worked with a group of Anglican priests helping them to reflect on their ministry. One of them was the police chaplain in Melbourne. I shall never forget one of the stories he shared. A young girl had been murdered. When the whereabouts of her body was finally disclosed, it was discovered that it was in the Melbourne tip. After her body was retrieved, her distraught family made the astonishing decision that they wished to go to the place where her body was discovered. They asked the Anglican chaplain to go with them. We can imagine the scene: this noisy, dusty, dirty, smelly, vast landscape of rubbish. And in the midst of this horrible dystopian world of Melbourne's rubbish tip, the family knelt to pray for their daughter and for the one who had murdered her. They lit a candle. That flame was so fragile, and yet it was their Christian protest against the enormous ugliness of the situation. And in that moment that flickering flame represented a power stronger than the darkness all around them. And it gave a powerful example of the truth that all the darkness in the world cannot extinguish the light of a single candle, no matter how flickering it may be.

When we can find the courage to light our own candle, so to speak, in the face of the evil we may encounter; when we can find the courage to say deep within ourselves that the evil we face is not the final story; when we can find the courage before the evil which we encounter to whisper in our hearts 'Christ is Risen, evil you have no power, the victory has already been won', then most truly have we become people of Hope.

# Becoming Agents of Hope

How is each of us called to become an agent of hope? Do I offer hope to others? Do others walk away from me with a renewed sense of hope? How can we be bearers of hope in a world where hope can often be in short supply?

It would be a mistake, however, to answer these questions with the expectation I make others simply feel different. Like Christian joy, Christian hope is not a feeling. The paradox is that I can feel quite sad, and yet – from a Christian perspective - still have joy. I can really struggle with the enormity of my challenges, and yet still have hope. I may not feel particularly good about the future, but I can still have hope. This is because both joy and hope – which go together - are not feelings. They are affirmations of faith – the faith that I am eternally known and embraced by Love, the faith that my problems do not define who I am because I have an identity and a dignity that is always greater than whatever situation in which I find myself. This is why joy and hope are the signs of the Holy Spirit given to me in my Baptism and Confirmation.

With this baptismal awareness, I live my life always attentive, then, to the wider picture, the bigger picture, the future picture. And this is what I can convey to others. I give hope to others when I am able to open them to the truth of themselves, when I can help them trust in their own goodness irrespective of all that might challenge this for them. And how do I do this? By the simplest ways.

Recently, I had the great fortune of meeting a most remarkable person, Barnaby Howarth. Barnaby thinks of himself as an average bloke. His story, however, is anything but average. A type-1 diabetic and former AFL player with the Sydney Swans, his life changed dramatically at the age of 25 when he was king hit in an alcohol-fueled attack, leading to a stroke and permanent brain damage. He was forced to rebuild his life and learnt to dig deep and find the power within to overcome his challenges. Then, when his first wife died of cancer, he had to again look within to move forward. But Barnaby has discovered a new purpose in his life, and now hosts quite an extraordinary podcast called, *Everyday Greatness.*

We are never to underestimate the power of everyday goodness. The simplest act of kindness, and of goodness, has an effect beyond what we can imagine. We know this: a stranger comes to help us when our car breaks down on a busy street; a shop attendant engages us with a warm smile when we feel quite stressed; someone gives us a simple gift when we least expected it. We know the effect of that goodness. It centres us; it lifts us; it assures us. Goodness is contagious.

If we could think each day, 'how can I express one act of kindness and goodness to a stranger I see today'. . . It gives hope to another, and it gives hope to myself. And then hopefully this matures to developing our capacity to be with others in their suffering, which is indeed one of the most powerful ways we can give hope to another.

As Pope Benedict wrote in his own essay on the nature and experience of hope in 2007, "Indeed, to accept the "other" who suffers, means that I take up their suffering in such a way that it becomes mine also . . . The Latin word *con-solatio,* "consolation", expresses this beautifully. It suggests *being with* the other in their solitude, so that it ceases to be solitude." This solidarity is what most gives rise to hope. When we share our suffering, when we find companionship with another in our suffering, when we realise we are not alone, the outcome is always hope even in the midst of the darkness that may be mine. In fact, the darkness may not even go away. But knowing I am not alone gives me the courage to continue to make decisions for love that begin to transform the darkness into a possibility.

Some decades ago, a book appeared called *The Wounded Storyteller*. It was written by a Canadian sociologist, Arthur Frank. Frank thought to explore how people respond to illness, especially chronic and terminal illness, and he began to map those responses that were effective in the sense that they brought hope and possibility to people, and those that didn't. He realised that often people respond simply with denial or with unrealistic expectations for recovery and therefore are left trapped where they are.

However, he made one very important observation. He recognized that the response that offered the greatest possibility, even in the face, of the most terminal of illnesses, was the sharing of stories. When we share our story with one another, especially if it be a story of pain or of struggle - but not only them, also stories of our successes and joys - then we experience solidarity with each other. That is why we called his study, *The Wounded Storyteller*. It is solidarity with another that offers us hope. When we are isolated, there is no hope.

But when we come together, and share our story, when we recognise that we are a part of a community, that we belong to a community of persons, our isolation with its despair is transformed into hope and possibility. Something happens when we open ourselves to others, when we experience that we are not alone, but that others are sharing what we are going through. And even though we may never be given the answers to our experiences, solidarity with others opens light in the midst of darkness, and dead ends become new beginnings. This is why our sense of belonging is the foundation for living with hope.

May our own community be such a beacon of hope in our world and may each of us carry that hope to all around us.

Notes

See https://barnabyhowarth.com.au/meet-barnaby/

Pope Benedict, *Spes Salvi*: On Christian Hope (30 November 2007), n. 38.

# Sunflowers in Babylon

**Joshua Luke Smith**
**https://singjupost.com/transcript**

**Uncle Terry's Legacy**
When Uncle Terry died, we placed sunflowers on his casket.
No children survived him, so he tithed his savings to the conservation of butterflies.
The church was called, those old stones holding the stories of thirty or so generations,
Matrimony and lament, baptism and dedication.
He was the last of his siblings, so now buried was a lineage,
Like those sunflowers that he cherished.
We printed a picture of him standing beneath one,
And decided that was how he'd be remembered.
All those memories now sunk beneath the soil,
But when spring arise and thaws the frost-bound ground, they will not rise.
Their time has come and gone.
We are but butterflies, fluttering for a day and believing it is forever.
What can I say of a life that was so weathered,
And by that I mean, my uncle lived seasonally.
How else do you plant a garden, unless you submit to both the summer and the wintering?
His calloused hands told the story of handling living things.
The bleak cold mornings and that joy of welcome spring,
The pain of mourning what could have been,
And the joy in receiving the gifts the giver came to bring.
Are we not standing in the gardens planted by our forefathers?
Are we not reaping a harvest we didn't sow?
Are we not leaning on the limbs of an oak and standing within the shade of a forest that someone else chose to grow?

Martin Luther was asked, if you knew tomorrow the world would end and today would be your last,
How would you spend it? And he said, I would plant an apple tree.
The Greeks believed a society only thrived when people plant trees they know they'll never live to see.

**The Resistance**
So how fickle we have been, tossed by every changing wind,
Giving in before we have become a witness.
Yes, there is the life we live, but there is the unlived life within us,
And between the two stands the resistance.
Nietzsche put it like this, it is long obedience in the same direction that brings heaven to our streets.

So summon the critic, bring me the cynic, I'll tell him this, blessed are the meek.
Blessed is the one who still believes, childlike, impoverished, hardly able to even speak,
But who has not forgotten Solomon's wisdom.
For it is not the lack of wealth, reputation, or esteem, but the absence of vision that brings people to their knees.
So distracted by our greed and our lust to succeed,
We have gathered into barns instead of casting out our seed.
And yet it is the backs scarred by wooden beams and the sacrifice of fools
That remind us of the actions that actually move us closer to the renewal.

**The Sunflowers of Fukushima**
Did you hear of Fukushima?
When the sea brewed and the earth hurled herself into the ground,

A nuclear site erupted. An invisible storm rained down,
Contaminating the land and poisoning the food.
They evacuated thousands, but for those that couldn't move,
They stayed housed in, surrounded by elusive clouds that lingered like ghosts,
Becoming suspicious of the air that they once innocently consumed.
And yet, amongst the chaos, there was a monk, dressed in crimson hues,
Who walked through those fields planting sunflower seeds within the ruins.
And over time, they grew and they removed the poison,
Sunflowers, offering themselves as objects of both beauty and atonement.
They drew the cancer from the ground into themselves until it was broken down
And now stand where sunflowers lift their golden crowns.
We find evidence of this hope. Even in the soil of decay, something beautiful can grow.

**The Prophet's Call**
I hear the voice of an ancient prophet speaking to a depleted people,
Housed in the walls of exile and defeat.
They are longing for a home they've only heard of,
A city they're unsure of, a country where they hope to be,
And it is to them this wild man comes with fire on his tongue.
He descends with a word from the god that they have almost forgotten, and he says,
Do you want a revolution? Do you want a revelation?
Do you want to renew your vision and restate a broken nation?

Do you want to overthrow the systems that have polluted the minds of your children and your spirits?
Do you want to live in abundance and remember where you come from?
Do you want to do the will of God or at least undo the will of demons?
Do you want to see people prosper in every sphere and across every tier of meaning?
Do you want to live a life worth remembering? Do you want to leave a legacy?
Do you want to offer something to future generations only now brewing in the wombs of their mothers and the hearts of their fathers?
Do you want to be worthy ancestors?
Do you want to answer the call and stand before kings, not as princes or princesses, but as jesters,
Making a mockery of power built on bricks towards heaven?
Do you believe beauty can save the world,
That the stories told within those trenches were more powerful in the hands of the soldiers than their weapons?
Do you want to starve out the madness and restore man's appetite for sanity?
Do you want to come back to clarity and conviction?
Do you want to build a society on the foundations of wisdom instead of self-serving ambition?

**Well then, plant a garden. Plant a garden in Babylon.**
**Bury your seeds in the soil that you've battled against for so long because this is the only world to which you will ever belong.**

So turn your exile into Eden and turn your sorrow into a song.
Turn your rejection into the birth pains of restoration and mine from your frustration the potential of growth.

Pull from your suffering a morsel of hope and forgive your captives.
Forgive the ones that made you bleed, let them go, for it is time for us to build.
No. It is time for us to sow. No. It is time for us to become the seed,
To live in proximity, to lay our lives down so that others one day can simply breathe.
Empty the barns in which you've stored.

**Build a bigger table. Invite your enemies over for dinner and open up your doors. Love your neighbors like you love yourself and love yourself like you love your neighbors and for the love of God, remember the poor. Remember the poor. Remember the poor.**

Sweep your streets like you're paving gold because in reality you are.
How you do anything is how you do everything. Make your stand against injustice loud. No.
Make it definite. Push the needle towards integrity.
Pour Kintsugi gold into the hostage memory. Turn those ashes into confetti.
Burn down the idols and craft wedding rings,
Covenantal icons from the bedsheets of adultery
And build tree houses for your children in the garden of Gethsemane.
I don't know if we have long left and I don't know if they'll remember me or you,
But we do have work to do and this may be our legacy,
Sunflower shoots in Babylonian cemeteries or how the mighty have fallen
For they have built empires out of the dust from which they came
And we have watched them fall time and again, but we will not do the same

We have learned from their mistakes in their place.
We will build not high rise apartments or regal estates, but gardens
Because who is really in prison when steel bars become a trellis,
When roses wrap themselves around the fences of a cell,
That's when the fires of hell are drowned in the mountain springs that come down from heaven.

**A Final Tribute**
When my uncle Terry died, we placed sunflowers on his casket
And we let the tears dry on our skin.
**We vowed despite the powers in present darkness, we would not cower, nor would we give in.**