

Introduction:

You have asked four questions on the theme of “hope”. Of these, I have chosen one, question 3, which states that “St. Benedict neither wrote nor discussed anything in his writings on the subject of hope...” Before answering this question, I'm wondering if the word “hope” is reserved just for us, or is it for everybody? I think that a Christian, like everyone, always hopes that the coming moment will be the fulfillment of the present moment, that tomorrow will be better than today. Yes, in this way everyone goes from hope to hope.

As for us, should we say that the joy of hope must be our fundamental attitude?

1. Faith is hope:

For us Christians who believe in the resurrection of Christ, hope is the joy of the Easter victory, Christ's victory over death. It is the power of the Lord in the world, where we can always be joyful, even throughout difficulties and suffering.

I believe in the joy of hope founded on faith in the resurrection, which helps us to come out of ourselves, our difficulties and our anxieties, which transports us into the contemplation of the glorious Christ; it gives us detachment with respect to the world of sin that engenders sadness, in order to make us taste the joy of the invisible world of the saints assembled around the Risen One. All our life, hidden with Christ in God, uplifts and sustains our joy.

Yes, this joy of hope draws us to prayer. The discreet and simple witness of this joy is a striking sign of the presence of Christ in us, he who is our life and our hope.

But the joy of hope is not easy; it is a fruit of spiritual combat against the forces of evil, which, taking over our wounded psyche, always want to make us sad. There are days when our anxieties and woes, perhaps still more our desires, can make us want to hide and feel sorry for ourselves. But the joy of Christ is there, keeping watch as an Other, and this joy comes to pull us out of solitude and worry, to bring us to the feast of the Kingdom of God, where the communion of Christ's saints sing and rejoice.

The world today needs joy, not outer but inner joy. Every day, people come to my community either to pray, or to see us and share their worries, their sufferings and many other concerns... We need to welcome them with joy, a joy that is in communion with them, and not only communion with their sadness, but also with their hope, their happiness, their celebrations. The joy of hope is fully human; it is the remedy for the anxiety and sadness of so many people who unconsciously wait for

us to give them a sign of communion, compassion and hope of true happiness, through the peaceful joy that radiates Christ.

Let us not forget that peace is the sister of the joy of hope. It is also its source in the certainty of the resurrection and of the kingdom of Christ. St. Paul wrote: *“Never worry about anything; but tell God all your desires of every kind in prayer and petition shot through with gratitude, and the peace of God which is beyond our understanding will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.”* (Phil. 4:6-7) It is in our prayer life that we nourish in our hearts this peace which comes from God.

With others, we can entrust and turn everything over to Christ: our concerns, our worries and our problems, certain that God, in his compassion, will take care of everything and find the right solution. We can then wait in peace, even if the answer to prayer is not given right away. In peace, sustained by prayer, we can again find unity within ourselves, a unity often divided by the events and temptations of existence.

As Jesus proclaimed in the Beatitudes: *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.”* (Mt 5,9)

2. Hope in prayer:

If, by faith, we are truly filled with peace and the love of God and others, we shall never despair of ourselves or others; we believe and hope all things, as long as there is a change of heart in the face of situations.

To arrive at this state, we must be in relationship with God, live in peace with HIM from morning until evening. I don't know what you think of this, but as far as I am concerned, I think it is possible, on the condition that this relationship (with God) comes from a community that really lives what it prays for, that is to say, a community living in sisterly love, earning their living by their work, having times of silence and spiritual deepening, keeping a certain enclosure...

When our community trusts God completely, our hope will allow us to trust everyone, and will thus transfigure situations, sufferings and events.

In fact, in prayer we need to live the Word of God, because by living according to one Word, then another and still another, we have seen that the effects of the practical applications of the Word of God are identical. For example, we come to the same conclusion, *“Blessed are the pure in heart...”* (Mt 5:8). Since God is love, his Word is charity and every day we practice and discover charity in every Word.

In living the Word, we often call to mind the saying of the Vietnamese martyr Paul Le Bao Tinh (d. 1857), who is an example of faith for us. He was able to transform suffering by the force of hope that comes from faith:

“I, Paul, bound in chains for Christ, I want to tell you the tribulations in which I am buried every day, so that you, ultimately burning with Divine love, may bless the Lord with me, for his mercy endures forever.” (Histoire de l’Eglise du Vietnam, *Histoire des Martyrs du Vietnam*, by Vincent Bui Duc Vinh, pages 239-240).

This prison was truly a prefiguring of eternal hell, as Pope Benedict XVI said in his letter *Spe Salvi*. He (Paul) truly had a free heart, a soul that chose only God.

Finally, I think we need to be beings of inner peace who radiate and create peace among the beings who surround us. Because of our life of prayer, we never rejoice in the divisions that occur between people, but instead we prefer peace and unity above all else.

Everything is grace for us, if we are inhabited by hope; even in difficulties and suffering, hope brings to maturity the faith that gives birth to charity.

3. Do the vows bring us hope?

When a person opens her inner being to the light of God, she receives a strength to hope that is inscribed in existence itself, and which, by a gift from on high, already contains that to which it aspires, a love that cleaves to the Lord, possession of a treasure that is none other than God, a human solidarity united by the pure adhesion of all to Christ.

I remember when I made my vows; I thought that I was participating in the hope of the whole Church, and that I had to bring all the strength of that hope to my commitment. In other words, the vows, for me, are a way to make hope enter into human existence, in an imperfect fashion, to be sure, but real. Voluntary poverty signifies the acquisition of a treasure in heaven (Mt. 19:21); community life based not on natural relationships but uniquely on supernatural charity gives a foretaste of the heavenly community.

I would like to say that this hope does not put us in a more comfortable situation. To try to bring about something supernatural in the context of natural life is to expose oneself to feeling inwardly torn apart. Christians who live their faith deeply experience this tearing apart, and we, religious who live consecration and vows, live it even more profoundly.

In hope, we do not lack sympathy for those who encounter difficulties and obstacles in their ascent to God, with those who know halts and backslidings. It is uniquely from within such sympathy that one can affirm Christian hope.

Thus, to hope is to reveal to others the deepest reason for living.

Here we can observe that when we talk about the vow of obedience, for example when we base our thoughts on the imitation of Christ: it is given to us by the word and example of Christ and by the paschal mystery which is – or seems to be – the basis of all hope.

I think of the day when my sisters were praying for me. At a given moment, they invited me to choose Jesus once again as the Lord of my life, freely and with full knowledge. At that point, I felt as though a fire were over me. Jesus seemed to have been there for a long time, waiting for me. No, it wasn't an illusion; it was “The Christ”¹ whom I chose.

Yes, following in the footsteps of Christ, here below, means “to be crucified with HIM”, but in hope, to be glorified by triumphant Love in His eternal Kingdom.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, I would like to say to you that joy is never absent from us, but it is a joy of hope, that consists of hope. “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (Gal 5,24)

Hope is the fruit of faith, where we do not seek to win others over to our point of view, because we have confidence in the Holy Spirit, who alone can persuade hearts of the truth of Christ. The truth of Christ is joy, peace and hope that the Holy Spirit calls forth with faith in the Word of God.

Finally, I am happy to say to you that even though the Rule of St. Benedict says nothing about hope, it nevertheless shows us the path of hope through the Word of God, because hope speaks first of all of the realization of the promises of God: God is always faithful to his promises and he wants to bring about happiness for all people.

Documents consulted:

- 1- The letter *Spe Salvi* by Pope Benedict XVI
- 2- *Des moines et des hommes* (Of Monks and Men), by Ghislain Lafont.
- 3- The Gospels, in the TOB version (*Traduction œcuménique de la Bible*)

¹ He became obedient unto death, even death on a cross! Therefore God has highly exalted him and has given him a Name that is above every name.” (Phil. 2: 8-11). He has given him the name Kyrios, Lord.