

JOHN PAUL II

“HOPE WHICH IS OPEN TO ANYONE...”*

The Holy Spirit, poured out ‘without measure’ by Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is “the One who builds the kingdom of God within the course of history and prepares its full manifestation in Jesus Christ ... which will come at the end of time.”¹ In this eschatological perspective believers are called, during this year dedicated to the Holy Spirit, to a renewed appreciation of the theological virtue of hope, which “on the one hand encourages the Christian not to lose sight of the final goal which gives meaning and value to life, and on the other, offers solid and profound reasons for a daily commitment to transform reality in order to make it correspond to God’s plan.”²

St. Paul underlines the intimate and deep bond which exists between the gift of the Holy Spirit and the virtue of hope. “Hope,” he says in the Letter to the Romans, “does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5). Yes, the very gift of the Holy Spirit, filling our hearts with God’s love and making us children of the Father in Jesus Christ (cf. Gal 4:6), instils in us the sure hope that nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:39). For this reason, the God revealed in the “fullness of time” in Jesus Christ is truly “the God of hope,” who fills believers with joy and peace, so that “by the power of the Holy Spirit [they] may abound in hope” (Rom 15:13). Thus Christians are called to be witnesses to this joyful experience in the world, and to “always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls [them] to account for the hope” that is in them (1 Pt 3:15).

* Address delivered during the General Audience in the Vatican on November 11, 1998. For the original text, see http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/1998/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_11111998.html.

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¹ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, November 10, 1994, Section 45.

² *Ibidem*, Section 46.

Christian hope brings to fulfilment the hope inspired by God in the People of Israel, and finds its own origin and model in Abraham, who “believed against hope that he should become the father of many nations” (Rom 4:18). Ratified in the covenant made by the Lord with his people through Moses, the hope of Israel was constantly rekindled down the centuries by the preaching of the prophets. Lastly, it was centered on the promise of the eschatological outpouring of God’s Spirit on the Messiah and on all his people (cf. Is 11:2; Ez 36:27; Jl 3:1–2). This promise was fulfilled in Jesus. He is not only the witness to the hope which is open to anyone who becomes his disciple. He himself, in his person and in his work of salvation, is “our hope” (1 Tm 1:1), since he proclaims and brings about God’s kingdom. The Beatitudes are the ‘Magna Charta’ of this kingdom (cf. Mt 5:3–12). “The Beatitudes raise our hope toward heaven as the new Promised Land; they trace the path that leads through the trials that await the disciples of Jesus.”³

Made Christ and Lord through the paschal mystery (cf. Acts 2:36), Jesus becomes “a life-giving spirit” (1 Cor 15:45), and believers, baptized in him with water and the Spirit (cf. Jn 3:5), are “born anew to a living hope” (1 Pt 1:3). Henceforth the gift of salvation, through the Holy Spirit, is the pledge and seal (cf. 2 Cor 1:21–22; Eph 1:13–14) of the full communion with God to which Christ leads us. The Holy Spirit, one reads in the Letter to Titus, was “poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life” (Ti 3:6–7).

Also according to the Fathers of the Church the Holy Spirit is “the gift which lavishes perfect hope upon us.”⁴ In fact, says St. Paul, it is the Spirit “bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:16–17). Christian life grows and matures to its fullness from that ‘already’ of salvation which is the life of God’s children in Christ, in which we are made to share by the Holy Spirit. From the experience of this gift, it longs with trusting perseverance for the ‘not yet’ and the ‘yet more,’ which God has promised us and will give us at the end of time. Indeed as St. Paul maintains, if one is really a son, then one is also heir to all that belongs to the Father with Christ, the “first-born among many brethren” (Rom 8:29). “All that the Father has is mine,” says Jesus (Jn 16:15). For this reason, in communicating his Spirit to us, he makes us share in the inheritance of the Father and gives us the pledge and first fruits. This divine reality is the inexhaustible source of Christian hope.

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Section 1820

⁴ St. Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate*, II, 1, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3302.htm>.

The Church’s teaching sees hope as one of the three theological virtues, poured out by God into the heart of believers through the Holy Spirit. It is that 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.”⁵ To the gift of hope “special attention should be given ... especially in our day in which many people, including quite a few Christians, are floundering in the illusion and myth of an unlimited capacity for self-redemption and self-fulfillment and the temptation to pessimism from the experience of frequent disappointment and defeat.”⁶ Many dangers seem to loom over the future of humanity, many uncertainties weigh on man’s personal destiny and he frequently feels incapable of dealing with them. In addition, the crisis of the meaning of life and the enigma of pain and death keep knocking relentlessly at the door of our contemporaries’ hearts. The message of hope which comes from Jesus Christ brightens this horizon darkened by uncertainty and pessimism. Hope sustains and protects us in the good fight of faith (cf. Rom 12:12). It is nourished by prayer, and most particularly by the “Our Father,” “the summary of everything that hope leads us to desire.”⁷

Today it is not enough to reawaken hope in individual consciences; it is necessary *to cross the threshold of hope together*. Hope, in fact, essentially has—as we will have the opportunity to examine—a community as well as a social dimension, so that what the Apostle says in the proper and direct sense for the Church can in a broader sense be applied to the vocation of all humanity: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call” (Eph 4:4).

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Section 1817.

⁶ J o h n P a u l II, “General Audience,” July 3, 1991, *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, July 8, 1991: 11.

⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Section 1820.