

POPE BENEDICT XVI

ENCYCLICAL ON HOPE



Spe Salvi

“FOR IN THIS HOPE WE WERE SAVED.”

ROMANS 8:24

“Hope is a virtue” is a familiar saying, and it’s true. Hope is a virtue: one of the three theological virtues, the others being faith and love.

The virtue of hope involves desiring the joy of eternal life with God above everything else and depending on God’s grace, rather than our own strength, on that journey. (CCC #1817)

Hope can be a challenge, though. There are so many voices in the world trying to convince us that God isn’t real, so why hope in him? We are encouraged to place our hope in human achievement — including our own — instead. We suffer and lose hope. The reality of death frightens us into hopelessness.

In his second encyclical, *Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict teaches us about hope. He answers the questions that people today have about what hope really is and reminds us of the truly Good News at the heart of our Christian hope:

Heaven is not empty. Life is not a simple product of laws and the randomness of matter, but within everything and at the same time above everything, there is a personal will, there is a Spirit who in Jesus has revealed himself as Love. (5)



The Crosiers

What Is Hope?

Pope Benedict begins with the hope of the early Christians. They lived in a world that placed its hope in false gods, an indifferent universe, and limited human philosophies — a world perhaps not so different from ours, after all.

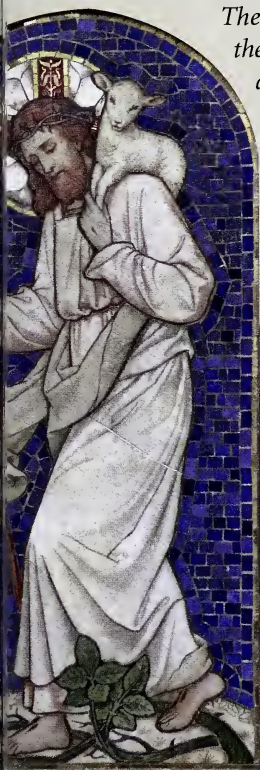
St. Paul reminded these early Christians often that they had been saved from all of that — freed from false hope and given the real hope of eternal life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The dark door of time, of the future, has been thrown open. The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life. (2)

This is our hope, as well.

In *Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict highlights several important characteristics of hope:

• **Hope is rooted in Jesus Christ:**



The true shepherd is one who knows even the path that passes through the valley of death; one who walks with me even on the path of final solitude, where no one can accompany me, guiding me through: he himself has walked this path, he has descended into the kingdom of death, he has conquered death, and he has returned to accompany us now and to give us the certainty that, together with him, we can find a way through. (6)

• **Hope changes our lives:**

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. His Kingdom is not an imaginary hereafter, situated in a future that will never arrive; his Kingdom is present wherever he is loved and wherever his love reaches us. (31)

• **Hope unites us to others in Christ.**

Our hope is always essentially also hope for others; only thus is it truly hope for me too. As Christians we should never limit ourselves to asking: how can I save myself? We should also ask: what can I do in order that others may be saved and that for them too the star of hope may rise? Then I will have done my utmost for my own personal salvation as well. (48)



Agnus Images

In communion with Christ, we live in real and lasting hope, a hope that the love of Christ impels us to share with the world.

Pope Benedict gives us examples of faithful disciples, strong in hope, throughout his encyclical: St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Vietnamese martyr St. Paul Le-Bao-Tinh (d. 1857), Vietnamese Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan (1928-2002) and St. Josephine Bakhita (1869-1947).

St. Josephine was brought as a slave, beaten and abused, from the Sudan to Italy, where she found faith in Jesus, was received into the Church, and experienced real freedom. She joined a religious congregation and spoke throughout Italy, sharing her story:

Now she had “hope” — no longer simply the modest hope of finding masters who would be less cruel, but the great hope: “I am definitively loved and whatever happens to me — I am awaited by this Love. And so my life is good.” (3)



OSV F

The Temptation of False Hope

We all place hope in many things in life, great and small. All ultimately fail us.

We have hope that our personal efforts or relationships will bring us happiness, and they do — for a while. Our world invites us to have hope in the great material and scientific achievements of humanity. These achievements are certainly a good, but they also have the power to cause great destruction and warp the human spirit. We also know that even in the midst of this kind of progress, human beings can still be sad and lonely, drifting without lasting hope. We can't place our ultimate hope in the things of this world. The only sure hope is that which God — who is eternal, unchanging, and faithful truth, love, and life — offers.

As Pope Benedict writes:

Let us say once again: we need the greater and lesser hopes that keep us going day by day. But these are not enough without the great hope, which must surpass everything else. This great hope can only be God, who encompasses the whole of reality and who can bestow upon us what we, by ourselves, cannot attain. (31)

Learning and Practicing Hope

The virtues, including hope, are gifts from God, but we have a part to play in how they shape our lives. Pope Benedict highlights three major areas in which we can learn and practice the virtue of hope and let it take root in our lives.

I. Prayer

Of course, we all come to God with our weakness and emptiness, seeking hope. Pope Benedict reminds us first that when we join these yearnings of our hearts with the great ancient prayers of God's people, the Church, we do steadily grow in real hope:

In prayer we must learn what we can truly ask of God — what is worthy of God. We must learn that we cannot pray against others. We must learn that we cannot ask for the superficial and comfortable things that we desire at this moment — that meagre, misplaced hope that leads us away from God. We must learn to purify our desires and our hopes. (33)



Comstock

II. Action and Suffering

Our actions of love and service teach us hope. Our hope in God and his greater purposes give us the courage to follow him and bring goodness and justice into this broken world — to bring the hope of Christ to others. (See #35)

Suffering, too, teaches us hope because in that suffering, we are not alone. Jesus is our companion, and our suffering is joined to his:

Suffering and torment is still terrible and well-nigh unbearable. Yet the star of hope has risen — the anchor of the heart reaches the very throne of God. Instead of evil being unleashed within man, the light shines victorious: suffering — without ceasing to be suffering — becomes, despite everything, a hymn of praise. (37)

“Offer It Up”

Past generations of Catholics were often reminded to “offer up” their suffering. Pope Benedict suggests that we might consider a revival of this practice:

*What does it mean to offer something up? Those who did so were convinced that they could insert these little annoyances into Christ's great “com-*passion*” so that they somehow became part of the treasury of compassion so greatly needed by the human race. In this way, even the small inconveniences of daily life could acquire meaning and contribute to the economy of good and of human love. (40)*



Corel Photo

III. Judgment

In a world filled with suffering and injustice, it is tempting to lose hope and wonder where God could be in such a place. Pope Benedict teaches in *Spe Salvi* that even in the midst of the world's injustice, there is reason for hope: the Final Judgment and the coming together of all things in Christ.

Why? Because if we depend on the world to make sense of itself, we really are left without hope. What within the world can make injustice and exploitation “right” or finally let goodness and love reign? Nothing.

But in Jesus, we find the answer. We see God's answer to the injustices of this world, and it is an answer of hope, living and true — Jesus, unjustly crucified, now risen and victorious over sin and death:

Yes, there is a resurrection of the flesh. There is justice. There is an “undoing” of past suffering, a reparation that sets things aright. For this reason, faith in the Last Judgment is first and foremost hope — the need for which was made abundantly clear in the upheavals of recent centuries. (43)

This judgment touches each of us individually as well. The world cannot make itself whole, and neither can we do that for ourselves. Our only and final hope is in the God who made us and we trust will bring us back to him, forever. In particular, in the Church's ancient teaching on Purgatory, we find hope in the burning, purifying gaze of Christ, as we stand before him in our weakness and sin:

His gaze, the touch of his heart heals us through an undeniably painful transformation "as through fire". But it is a blessed pain, in which the holy power of his love sears through us like a flame, enabling us to become totally ourselves and thus totally of God. In this way the interrelation between justice and grace also becomes clear: the way we live our lives is not immaterial, but our defilement does not stain us for ever if we have at least continued to reach out towards Christ, towards truth and towards love. (47)



Mary, Star of Hope

Life can sometimes seem like a long, dark night, in which we desperately search for light to guide our way and give us hope. Pope Benedict reminds us that a traditional title for Mary is *Ave Maris Stella*, or "Star of the Sea," because her faith in Jesus, like that of all the saints, is a witness to the power of hope in God's promise. He ends *Spe Salvi* asking Mary to be with us as we journey in hope:

Thus you remain in the midst of the disciples as their Mother, as the Mother of hope. Holy Mary, Mother of God, our Mother, teach us to believe, to hope, to love with you. Show us the way to his Kingdom! Star of the Sea, shine upon us and guide us on our way! (50)



3337706
For More Information:

Pope Benedict XVI. *The Apostles*, 2007

———. *Questions and Answers*, 2008

Archbishop Timothy N. Dolan. *Called to Be Holy*, 2005

Fr. Benedict J. Groeschel. *The Virtue-Driven Life*, 2006

Fr. Benedict J. Groeschel and Bishop Robert J. Baker.
When Did We See You, Lord?, 2005

Amy Welborn. *Here. Now. A Catholic Guide to the Good Life*, 2005

All books above available through Our Sunday Visitor.

For the full text of Pope Benedict XVI's Encyclical *Spe Salvi*, "Saved by Hope," go to the Vatican Web site at www.vatican.va.

For additional Catholic resources
or to order bulk copies of this pamphlet contact:

Our Sunday Visitor

200 Noll Plaza • Huntington, IN 46750
1-800-348-2440 • Fax: 1-800-498-6709 • www.osv.com

The Scripture citations used in this work are taken from the *Second Catholic Edition of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible* (RSV), copyright 1965, 1966, 2006 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Copyright © 2007 by Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.

By Amy Welborn

Inventory No. P546

US \$14.95

ISBN 978-1-59276-407-5



9 781592 764075