

## **XI Sunday after Pentecost - Hope**

*In the name of the Father...*

*For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle,  
because I persecuted the Church of God.*

*But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain.*

I have spoken recently about the life of grace being characterized by the three theological virtues of *faith*, *hope* and *charity* which attain God himself as the author of the supernatural order, proportioning us to laying hold of the beatific vision, entering eternal life.

Although not specifically mentioned, the theme of *hope* is prominent in today's Mass. When we speak of *hope*, however, we must distinguish the supernatural virtue of *hope* from the natural passion of the same name.

To be refined by virtue, God endowed man with well-ordered passions to help initiate and sustain activity in pursuit of perfection, i.e., goods proportioned to human nature. In is only in the post-lapsarian state - through contracting Original Sin and accumulating vices - that disordered passions become impediments to virtuous action, necessitating mortification.

The concupiscible appetite considers sense goods simply: its basic passions are *love* of good and *hatred* of evil. The irascible appetite considers goods under the aspect of being difficult to attain: its passions are *hope* and *despair* in respect of good, *daring* and *fear* in respect of evil.<sup>1</sup>

The object *hope*, then, is a good – something perfective of man – with the added note of being difficult - but possible - to attain. *Hope* then, is appetitive: it initiates and sustains activity in the pursuit of a future arduous possible good. By God's design, the passion of *despair* mitigates against needlessly wasting energy in pursuit of an impossible goal.

The cardinal virtue which moderates the irascible appetite – the passions of *hope*, *fear*, *daring* and *despair* is *fortitude*. The notion of *fortitude*, then, has a close connection with the notion of *hope*.

Distinct from the passion, the theological virtue of *hope* is seated in the will and is concerned only with the ultimate arduous good, eternal life. As beatitude is a strictly supernatural good, in its pursuit *hope* relies on – attains to – God, under the formality of his omnipotence and fidelity.

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<sup>1</sup> [ST Ia IIae 45, 2, c](#): *Hope* pertains to pursuit of a good, *fear* to avoidance of an evil. *Daring* rises from *hope* to pursue an evil on account of an associated good. *Despair* rises from fear to avoid a good on account of an associated evil.

With the advent of sin, *hope* must also rest on God's *mercy*. The collect for today's Mass asks God to... *pour out your mercy upon us, that you may dismiss what the conscience fears and add what prayer does not presume*. Relying on God's *mercy*, we *hope* to avoid perdition and to attain beatitude.

*Hope* first is infused into the will at Baptism which is prefigured in today's gospel, for the principal obligation of the baptized, the impediments of Original Sin being removed, is to hear the *faith* and confess it.

There are two vices contrary to *hope*. *Presumption* either relies excessively on one's own powers rather than God's, or expects what God has not promised, pardon without repentance, beatitude without striving. The opposite defect of *discouragement* occasions abandoning good works in the face of trials, contradictions, even the memory of past sins; unchecked, it can lead to *sloth* and even *despair*.

This year we lament the 500th anniversary of the revolt of Martin Luther, who, woefully misunderstanding St Paul, concocted a theology of salvation by *faith alone*, or rather salvation by *presumption alone*, a theology all too prevalent in the Catholic Church today.

Grace, however, and salvation can be lost. In the epistle for today's Mass St Paul writes: *you are being saved*.<sup>2</sup> Grammatically, Paul writes in the present tense, describing a continuing state, not something settled in the past. He reinforces this, adding: *...if you hold fast*. For Luther, *presumption's* certitude is of salvation: *hope's* certitude, however, is of tending to salvation.

About tending to salvation, first we can recognize the role of *fortitude*, and especially the virtues of *patience* and *endurance* which strengthen us against succumbing to the sorrows of this life and sustain us in the extended pursuit of the ultimate good, eternal life. Thus, St Peter writes: *For the God of all grace who has called us into his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will perfect us after we have suffered a little*.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, St Paul writes: *For I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come*.<sup>4</sup>

Second, for those who suffer the calamity of mortal sin and destroy God's gifts infused at Baptism, the merciful God has instituted the sacrament of Confession. Thus, if having made a thorough examination of conscience we are not aware of unconfessed mortal sins and have placed no obstacle to absolution, e.g., by refusing to remove a voluntary near occasion of grave sin, then we can have moral certitude of being in a state of grace, of tending to salvation, of having well-founded *hope*.

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<sup>2</sup> [1 Cor 15:2](#)

<sup>3</sup> [1 Pet 5:10](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Rom 8:18](#)

Having cautioned against *presumption*, Paul addresses theological *despair*, to be distinguished from the God-given passion whose act can be good. If *presumption* reckons that sins - if they are recognized at all - need not, or automatically will be forgiven, *despair* reckons that sins cannot - or will not - be forgiven. St Paul could have been a prime candidate for *despair*. Of Our Lord commissioning him to be an apostle, he writes: *Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God,*<sup>5</sup> Paul having recounted elsewhere: *For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.*<sup>6</sup> If anyone had cause to *despair* of salvation, it was Paul. He recounts, however, God's *mercy*, his correspondence with God's grace, and his elevation to a very lofty status: *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me.*<sup>7</sup>

Those *discouraged* by past sins can resign themselves to spiritual insignificance. However, the psalmist writes: *Who is as the Lord our God, who dwells on high, and looks down on the low things in heaven and in earth? Raising up the needy from the earth, and lifting up the poor out of the dunghill, that he may place him with princes, with the princes of his people.*<sup>8</sup> We might recall also the parable of the laborers, and - on account of the latecomers' reward - the grumbling of the first-called, to whom the vineyard owner replied: *Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity? So, the last will be first, and the first last.*<sup>9</sup> God gives as he wills, as he did with Paul. No one knew God's mercy better than Paul. No one was better placed to write in praise of *hope*.

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<sup>5</sup> [1 Cor 15:8-9](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Gal 1:13](#)

<sup>7</sup> [1 Cor 15:10](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Ps 113:7-8](#); [1 Sam 2:8](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Mt 20:15-16](#)