



The Holy See

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We await new heavens and a new earth¹. The Holy Spirit is the source of the “hope that does not disappoint” (*Rom* 5:5). In this light, after examining some of the “signs of hope” present in our time, today we would like to reflect on the meaning of Christian hope in this season of waiting and preparation for the coming of the kingdom of God in Christ at the end of time. In this regard, as I emphasized in my Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, we must remember that “the basic attitude of hope, on the one hand, encourages the Christian not to lose sight of the final goal that 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” (n. 46).² Hope in the definitive coming of God’s kingdom and the commitment to transform the world in the light of the Gospel have, in reality, one and the same source in the eschatological gift of the Holy Spirit. “The pledge of our inheritance, the first payment against the full redemption” (*Eph* 1:14), he awakens a longing for full and definitive life with Christ, and at the same time imbues us with the strength to spread the leaven of God’s kingdom throughout the earth. This is an anticipation, in a way, of the coming of God’s kingdom among men through Christ’s Resurrection. In him, the Incarnate Word who died and rose for us, heaven descended to earth, and earth, in his glorified humanity, ascended to heaven. The risen Jesus is present among his people and in the heart of human history. Through the Holy Spirit, he fills those who open themselves to him in faith and love; indeed, he gradually transfigures them, making them share in his own glorified life. They now live and act in the world with their gaze always focused on the final goal: “If then you have been raised with Christ”, St Paul urges, “seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God” (*Col* 3:1-4). Believers are therefore called to be witnesses in the world to Christ’s Resurrection and, at the same time, builders of a new society.³ The sacramental sign *par excellence* of the ultimate realities, already anticipated and made present in the Church, is the *Eucharist*. In the Eucharist the Spirit, invoked in the *epiclesis*, “transubstantiates” the sensible reality of the bread and wine into the new reality of Christ’s Body and Blood. In the Eucharist the risen Lord is truly present and, in him, humanity and the universe receive the seal of the new creation. In the Eucharist we have a taste of the definitive realities, and the world starts to become what it will be at the Lord’s final coming. The Eucharist, the summit of Christian life, does not only shape the personal life of the Christian but also the life of the ecclesial community and, in some way, that of all society. In fact, the People of God receive from the Eucharist that divine energy which prompts them to live deeply the communion of love signified and brought about by participation in the one table. This also results in a desire to share material goods in a spirit of brotherhood, using them to

build the kingdom of God (*Acts* 2:42-45). In this way the Church becomes “bread broken” for the world: for the people among whom she lives and especially for the most needy. The celebration of the Eucharist is the source of the various works of charity and mutual aid, of missionary activity and the different forms of Christian witness, by which the world is helped to understand the Church’s vocation according to God’s plan. In addition, by keeping alive the call not to be conformed to this world’s mentality and to live in expectation of Christ “until he comes”, the Eucharist teaches the People of God the way to purify and perfect their human activities by immersing them in the paschal mystery of the Cross and Resurrection.⁴ This is how we understand the true meaning of Christian hope. In turning our gaze towards the “new heavens and a new earth” in which righteousness dwells (cf. *2 Pt* 3:13), “far from diminishing our concern to develop this earth, the expectancy of a new earth should spur us on, for it is here that the body of a new human family grows, foreshadowing in some way the age which is to come” (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 39). The message of hope offered by the Christian community, in particular, should be kneaded into the cultural, social, economic and political involvement of the lay faithful as leaven of the Resurrection. If it is true that earthly progress must be distinguished from the growth of God’s kingdom (cf. *ibid.*), it is also true that in God’s kingdom, brought to completion at the end of time, “charity and its works will remain (cf. *1 Cor* 13:8; *Col* 3:14)” (*ibid.*). This means that everything accomplished in the love of Christ anticipates the final resurrection and the coming of the kingdom of God.⁵ Thus Christian spirituality appears in its true light: it is not a spirituality of flight from or rejection of the world, nor can it be reduced to mere temporal activity. Imbued by the Spirit with the life poured out by the Redeemer, it is a spirituality of the transfiguration of the world and of hope in the coming of God’s kingdom. As a result, Christians can discover that when the achievements of thought and art, of science and technology, are lived in a Gospel spirit, they witness to the spreading of God’s Spirit in all earthly realities. Thus the voice of the Spirit and the Bride who cry out: “Come! ... Come, Lord Jesus” (*Rv* 22:17-20) can be strongly heard, not only in prayer but also in our daily effort to prepare God’s kingdom in history. It is the stupendous conclusion of Revelation and, we can say, the Christian seal on history. *To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:* I extend a special welcome to the *Flying Hospital* organization, and I wish to encourage you in your medical and humanitarian work. I greet those taking part in the International Cardiological Symposium. I welcome the *FIRES Marriage Encounter* group, as well as the youth pilgrimage from the Archdiocese of Melbourne. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from Australia, Japan and the United States, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As the Church looks forward in hope and expectation to the Great Jubilee, we are reminded to be always prepared for the coming of God’s Kingdom at the end of time. The Holy Spirit prompts Christians to look forward to the fullness of life which Christ will bring, but in the meantime he gives them the strength to extend the Kingdom throughout the world. For this task the Spirit transforms those who believe and hope in Christ, making them sharers in the grace of Christ’s glorified existence.

The Eucharist is the great sacramental sign of the ultimate realities which are already anticipated and made present in the Church. The Eucharist is the summit of the Christian life, and the source of all forms of witness and evangelical love.

While Christian hope directs our gaze to “the new heavens and a new earth” (cf. *2 Pet* 3:13), it calls on us to be committed to bringing the transforming power of the Resurrection to bear on the

cultural, social, economic and political realities of the present. In our prayer and our efforts to spread God's Kingdom, let us join our voice to the voice of the Spirit and the Bride who say "Come Lord Jesus!" (*Rev 22:20*).

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