

The Virtue of Hope

Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. ~ Romans 5:2-5

SOMETIMES WE DISCUSS OUR DREAMS, aspirations, and goals in life. Usually such a discussion touches on success, power, prestige, money, and good health. We hope for these kinds of things but we are not certain they will come about. Depending on the state of the situation, "I hope things work out" could be encouraging words from a friend or words we say anxiously, and sometimes despairingly, to ourselves. It is certainly natural to wish the best for someone else or for ourselves, but wishing has nothing to do with the virtue of hope.

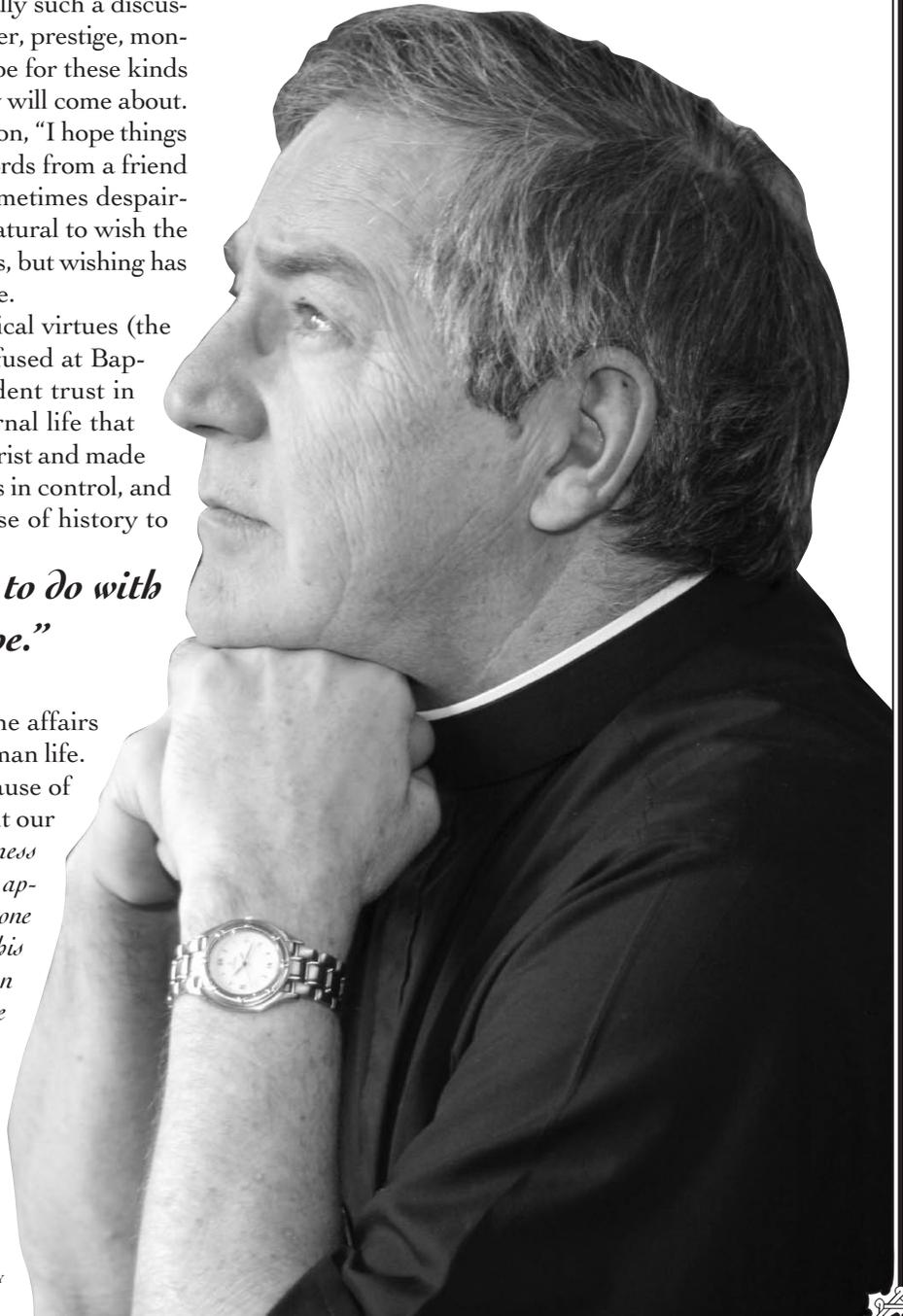
Hope is one of the three theological virtues (the other two are faith and charity) infused at Baptism into the soul. It is that confident trust in God's blessing and promise of eternal life that has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ and made available to us through faith. God is in control, and his providence is guiding the course of history to

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its final destination, including all the affairs and transactions of every single human life. Hope is that assurance in God because of the promises he made to bring about our true happiness. *"[W]hen the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life" (Ti 3:4-7).*

Christian hope is not about "hoping for the best," because that usually means relying on our

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own strength. Real hope is a *“sure and steadfast anchor of the soul”* (Heb 6:19) because we rely not on our own strength but the power of the Holy Spirit, for *“through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness”* (Gal 5:5). Nor is hope a last resort, something tried only after everything else has failed. In fact, it is really just the opposite. Hope should be present in every situation from the beginning and not something resorted to with wringing hands or crossed fingers. The prophet Jonah prayed in complete confidence and hope to God before he was rescued from the belly of the whale: *“I called to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and thou didst hear my voice. For thou didst cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood was round about me; all thy waves and thy billows passed over me. Then I said, ‘I am cast out from thy presence; how shall I again look upon thy holy temple?’ The waters closed in over me, the deep was round about me; weeds were wrapped about my head at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me for ever; yet thou didst bring up my life from the Pit, O Lord my God. When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came to thee, into thy holy temple. Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their true loyalty. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to thee; what I have vowed I will pay. Deliverance belongs to the Lord!”* (Jon 2:2-9).

We should get into the practice of stirring up hope the moment we are faced with a new challenge or

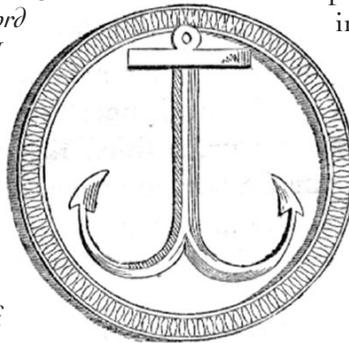
difficult situation. The Holy Spirit should be the first person we seek out when we need help or advice. *“Do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you”* (Mt 10:19-20). The reason for our hope is the Holy Spirit, because he alone has the answers to life’s problems and the strength and wisdom to sort them out: *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight”* (Prv 3:5).

There are two main enemies of hope. They are presumption and despair. The sin of presumption is a form of pride which erodes faith because it either presumes that we can save ourselves by our own strength apart from God or presumes that God’s salvation and forgiveness will be granted despite a lack of true repentance and conversion. The danger of presumption is that it disguises itself as hope and eventually destroys true faith in God. In despair, the person ceases to hope for salvation. Burdened down by sin and even great sufferings, he or she gives up any hope for eternal life and happiness with God. Usually the seeds of despair are sown in pessimism, which itself is the result of placing

hope in the wrong things. If we are becoming more pessimistic about the world or the state of affairs in our society, we should probably examine our hope, repent, and put God back in his proper place as Lord over our life and over the whole world. It is *“through him you have confidence in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God”* (1 Pt 1:21).

(CCC 1813, 1817-1821, 2090-

2092)



The anchor is a traditional Christian symbol for hope