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THE GOSPEL OF HOPE: EXPLORING THE THEOLOGICAL CORE OF THE JUBILEE YEAR 2025

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Abstract. The Catholic world celebrates another Holy Year in 2025, which promises to be a time of immense grace and conversion. The special motto assigned for this jubilee is "Pilgrims of Hope," in accord with the intention of Pope Francis to connect the celebration of the jubilee with the strengthening of hope in every human heart as the world moves away from traumas of the Covid-19 pandemic and from the catastrophes that occurred at the tail-end of this crisis. This calls for a renewed focus on the theme of Christian hope, which although one of the three theological virtues, is the least discussed or explored in theology. Thankfully, there is no need for a distant search since from the beginning of his ministry, Pope Francis has provided the Church with his own reflections and ruminations based on hope. This paper delves primarily on the presentation of hope in the Pope's weekly addresses from 2016-2017, to discover his theology of hope and his understanding of its relevance for the individual, for the community of the Church and for the whole world. During the pandemic when the Pope successfully conveyed his role as a universal religious leader with a compassionate concern for all, it was certainly his thoughts on hope that greatly enabled him in encouraging people to survive trials through the power of faith in a loving God and in the goodness and selflessness of ordinary people. Now that the task of rebuilding has begun, the theme of Christian hope can spur people to the pursuit

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of human development inspired by the Kingdom of God where hope abounds because it is anchored on the promise of the Father, is purified by the love from the Cross, and is driven confidently by the wind of the Spirit.

Keywords. Theological virtue; theology of hope; biblical hope; pandemic; Jurgen Moltmann

Introduction

In one of his monumental homilies, Pope Francis invited Catholics and people of goodwill everywhere to become heralds of hope.[1] Speaking to the crowds gathered for the inauguration Mass of his pontificate, he drew lessons from the life, virtues and challenges of St Joseph, whose feast day coincided with that historical event. Turning to the second reading of the liturgy, he reflected on Romans 4:18, where Saint Paul spoke of Abraham, who *"hoping against hope, believed."* The Pope acknowledged the darkness of the times and the call for everyone to become "men and women who bring hope to others."[2] Breaking through dark clouds, hope in God can help to protect creation and every person in a spirit of tenderness and love. Clearly the Pope considered this hope primarily as a theological virtue because it was "set against the horizon of God" and "built on the rock which is God."[3]

Faithful to his magisterial function, Pope Francis returned to the theme of Christian hope in a series of addresses given at the regular Wednesday General Audiences from 2016 to 2017. In presenting an extended catechesis on Hope, the Pope revealed the signature style of

[1] Brian Carpenter, "Pope Francis and the Virtue of Hope," Working to Beat Hell Blog, April 3, 2013, available at https://www.workingtobeathell.org/pope-francis-and-the-virtue-of-hope/ (accessed on February 15, 2024).

[2] Pope Francis, "Homily at the Mass for the Beginning of Petrine Ministry," March 19, 2023, Vatican Archives, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130319_omelia-inizio-pontificato.html (accessed on March 1, 2024).

[3] Pope Francis, "Homily at the Mass for the Beginning of Petrine Ministry."

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his pastoral theology: giving lessons from Scriptures and explaining it in a lively, concrete, and practical way that addresses the concerns of his audience. He provided anecdotes from his own experiences and occasionally veered from prepared texts to interject spontaneous and practical thoughts and counsel. Church and secular media paid scant attention to these series of speeches on the Christian virtue of hope; very few took time to comment on its contents or on the Pope's enthusiasm for his chosen theme. Perhaps even Pope Francis did not foresee how the theme was preparing him to confront and address a looming, worldwide menace that was coming in just a few years, a formidable challenge that he, the most recognizable and universal religious leader, would be called to accompany the people of the world in its battle against the Covid 19 pandemic. Was his early appeal to hope, together with his motto of mercy, providentially preparing him to reanimate and resurrect the spirits of all in the world who would be susceptible to resignation and despair?

Hardly recovering from the pandemic, conflicts between nations aggravated into wars, persecutions of religious, racial, and migrant minorities resurfaced, ecological and economic problems escalated, and incidences of mental health issues increased everywhere. In 2022, Pope Francis set his eyes on the Ordinary Jubilee or Holy Year celebrated in the Catholic world every twenty-five years. In his letter to the Pro-Prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization (Evangelization Section), Archbishop Rino Fisichella, the Pope situated the coming jubilee within the context of the worldwide experience of a pandemic and of the rising tide of universal hardships, poverty and unforeseen vicissitudes in people's personal and social lives even as the medical scourge receded.[4] To this end, Pope Francis chose as the theme of the Jubilee Year 2025, **Pilgrims of Hope**, with the aim of rejuvenating the spiritual lives of people through conversion, not merely personal, but towards a social and ecological transformation. In preparation, he

[4] Pope Francis, "Letter to Msgr. Fisichella for the Jubilee 2025," February 11, 2022, Vatican Archives, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/rancesco/en/letters/2022/documents/20220211-fisichella-giubileo2025.html (accessed on February 1, 2024).

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mandated 2024 to be observed as the **Year of Prayer**, a fitting prelude to the resurgence of hope during the Holy Year.

What is Pope Francis' understanding of hope and why is he offering this as a gift to the world today? How does his thinking on hope converge or diverge from the approaches made by others before him? What would be his special contribution to a specifically Catholic theology of Hope? This paper's modest aim is to discover from the aforementioned catechetical series on Hope, as well as from other papal messages, the Pope's own understanding of this theological virtue and its relevance to men and women of the world today. In the Extraordinary Jubilee on Mercy, the first jubilee proclaimed by Pope Francis, a wealth of teachings, reflections and actions based on God's attribute of mercy emerged from his heart and mind.[5] This present endeavor might prove helpful in providing people with a resource to focus their contemplation on a topic rarely explored, amplified, or tested even in ecclesial circles,[6] and in the process reveal the Pope's rich theological and pastoral legacy to a people emerging from the traumas of history and waiting in hope for healing, peace, and solidarity.

What is Christian Hope?

Traditionally, hope has been understood together with faith and love as a theological virtue, one of the three things that last (cf, 1 Cor. 13:13), "the modalities which describe Christian existence. As such, these virtues, grounded in the grace of the Spirit, express what never

[5] See Ramil Marcos, "The Theology of Mercy in the Life and Teachings of Pope Francis," *Landas* 34:1 (2020): 105-134.

[6] In the history of theology, it was often the case that it was easier to describe faith and charity than to describe hope, and so hope has been kept in soft focus as a junior partner of the the other two virtues; its conceptual development not equally and enthusiastically pursued. See David Eliott, "Hope in Theology," in *Historical and Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Hope*, ebook, ed. Steven van den Heuvel (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2020), 121.

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changes in Christian anthropology."[7] Theological virtues, according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church no. 1840, "dispose Christians to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity. They have God as their origin, their motive, and their object – God known by faith, God hoped in and God loved for his own sake."[8] Succinctly, the Church's Catechism describes hope as the virtue by which "we desire, and with steadfast trust await from God, eternal life and the graces to merit it."[9]

Pope Francis teaches that hope is primarily founded in God, and thus, a theological virtue.[10] While there is such a thing as natural hope, the human affect behind the will to live,[11] the virtue of which he speaks does not originate in humanity's power, because its provenance is beyond sight. However, through the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ, this hope has become visible, reliable, and comprehensible, truly a gift through God's initiative. In Jesus then, God walks with his children in their present journey of life in a way that gives them confidence and peace, without necessarily having no difficulties along the way. Jesus gives human beings the capacity to always be on the move, to undertake a journey that finds its destination in the arms of the Father who offers salvation. This is what the Letter to the Romans (8:24) means when it declares that "in this hope, we were saved." Believers are saved in hope when their interior lives become a constant journey, not a static compartment, towards openness to God who reveals himself in Jesus.

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[7] Michael Scanlon, "Hope" in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. Joseph Komonchak, et al. (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2011), 492-3.

[8] *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Definitive Edition* (Makati: Word and Life Publications, 1997). Henceforth, this will be referred to as *CCC*.

[9] *CCC* no. 1843.

[10] Pope Francis, "Christ's Birth is the Source of Hope," December 21, 2016, Vatican Archives, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2016/documents/papa-francesco 20161221_udienza-generale.html (accessed on Feb. 17, 2024).

[11] Scanlon, "Hope," 493.

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Hope is based, not on the clarity and comfort of present things, but on the allure and cogency of a promise. Through the prophets, God repeatedly assured the people of Israel that he was near, that he never abandoned them, that he was coming to liberate them. In the midst of their exile, God's **Here I am**, revealed his closeness and his plan for salvation, proclaimed by the prophet as an invitation to which the people joyfully responded.[12] In situations that elicit despair, "when everything seems finished, when, faced with many negative realities, and faith becomes demanding, and there comes the temptation which says that nothing makes sense anymore,"[13] hope comes when people long for God who assures them that he is coming to bring consolation and freedom. Despair is crushed by the knowledge that evil and suffering will not last and that God is among his beloved. The Lord beckons the people to behold not an impenetrable wall of impossibility but a horizon of hope. In the Incarnation of his Son, God fulfilled his message and realized his promise.

Hope is easily and readily grasped by simple, ordinary people. Pope Francis stressed that "hope is the virtue of the little ones."[14] The mighty and the great have no use for mere promises for they possess resources upon which to rely in life. In the Old Testament, during the exile, when people lost their homeland, their dignity and liberty, perhaps many also lost their faith in the God they thought abandoned and neglected them. But those who continued to trust in God's promises retained their capacity to smile because "only hope brings a smile."[15]

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[12] Pope Francis, "Christian Hope – Isaiah 52," December 14, 2016, Vatican Archives, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20161214_udienza-generale.html (accessed on February 2, 2024).

[13] Pope Francis, "Christian Hope – Isaiah 52."

[14] Pope Francis, "Christian Hope – Isaiah 40," December 7, 2016, Vatican Archives, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20161207_udienza-generale.html (accessed on March 1, 2024).

[15] Pope Francis, "Christian Hope – Isaiah 40."

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These little ones encountered the glory of God through exiles, deserts, loneliness, desperation and suffering for they allowed themselves to be taught by hope. In the New Testament, at the dawning of hope, Mary became the Mother of hope because her heart was full of faith enlivened by hope. Joseph gave the name "Jesus" to God's Child, the name that gave hope to all humankind that salvation from sin and death has come. The shepherds in Bethlehem, too represented the little ones who did not cling to material certainties or on their personal power, but instead hoped in the God of salvation.[16] These little ones have found their journey in life to be full of joy, of the readiness to do good, and the capacity to smile in the midst of trials and tribulations.

While hope is a basic human need, the force behind the will to survive, to press towards the future, and to assume a positive attitude in life, Pope Francis cautions against false hopes.[17] Moments come when instead of trusting in God, people seek for tangible and concrete assurances around them. They find these in the "ephemeral consolations" and false security of money, power, worldliness, and harmful ideologies, including what seems to be harmless soothsayers or fortune tellers who sell "false hopes." False hope can be bought, but real hope is gratuitous hope, freely given to those who fully and totally trust in God.[18] False hopes also come in the form of idols, not only the physical ones, but also the mental idols people conjure in their minds – obsession with wealth, power, success, vanity, beauty, or health. All these lead to death and to people in the church, these pursuits can lead to illusions, to worldliness. In the end, false hope disappoints but real hope does not disappoint, for God is not an idol, and thus, cannot disappoint.[19]

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[16] Pope Francis, "Christ's Birth is the Source of Hope."

[17] Pope Francis, "The False Hopes of Idols," January 11, 2017, Vatican Archives, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170111_udienza-generale.html (accessed on February 28, 2024).

[18] Pope Francis, "The False Hopes of Idols."

[19] Pope Francis, "The False Hopes of Idols."

A Biblical Panorama of Hope

The catechesis on Christian Hope started on December 7, 2016 and lasted until October 25, 2017, with a total of 38 addresses to the faithful. Pope Francis started each discourse by offering a biblical basis for the day's lesson, and while explaining the idea of hope conveyed by the scriptural verse or verses, elaborated on its meaning while also supporting his talk with practical spiritual or moral applications to daily life, in the homiletic fashion he is best known for. In what follows, this paper attempts to provide a synthesis of this wide-ranging discussion on hope by presenting select themes that best represent the major segments of his reflections. While not being exhaustive, the following themes unravel a theology of hope that traverses both Old and New Testament insights on Hope with its significance and meaning for the mission of the Church today.

A. Foreshadowing Hope: Old Testament Witnesses

Abraham's Irrational Hope

Abraham was the first Old Testament witness that Pope Francis extolled in his teaching series. Acknowledged as our father in faith, this patriarch is also rightly our father in hope.[20] This is what Romans 8 expressed when it described how Abraham "hoped against hope" itself. Abraham possessed what might be called an "irrational hope." Prodded by God's call, he left his homeland and became an outsider in search of the land the Lord will appoint to him. He also believed in what was an unlikely potential, having a son although his wife Sara's womb was all but dead to future life.

When the promised land materialized, Abraham was consumed with longing for the yet unfulfilled pledge. He was filled with despair at the thought of an impossible heir. Against a fitting backdrop of night, Abraham experienced the darkness of disappointment, discouragement, and impossibility. He then turned to prayer,

[20] Pope Francis, "Abraham, Father in Faith and Hope," in *Catechesis on Hope*, ebook, Pope Francis (Opus Dei Information Service, 2017), 15-17.

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discovering what Pope Francis suggests as a valid form of prayer – the prayer of lament, the prayer of complaint. For faith does not mean merely accepting things in silence. Hope does not mean conveniently being sheltered from perplexities and doubts. Trusting in God also means struggling with God, standing before him without pretenses, and courageously baring to him everything, including our bitterness. While Abraham thus conveyed his sentiments, God responded but in a yet another promise, showing him the stars as a guarantee. Abraham who asked for more hope, took this sight of the stars as the sign of God's fidelity to him and to his future descendants.[21]

Rachel's Tearful Hope

There was a "crying lady" in Jeremiah's prophecy (31: 15) and it was none other than Rachel, wife of Jacob and mother of their two sons Joseph and Benjamin. In the biblical account, Rachel sacrificed her life at the birth of her youngest, Benjamin. Now, the prophet portrayed her as being alive at Ramah, crying for her lost children, the people of Israel, who were gathered there as deportees into exile. Her refusal to be comforted conveyed the pain and bitterness of her loss, her compassion for the plight of her beloved people.

There is hope in empathy, in sensitivity and in solidarity with those who suffer. This maternal grief is what prompted God to answer with another promise of hope. Pope Francis observes that mysteriously, tears generate and sow hope, for they are "the seeds of hope."[22] Jeremiah's text on Rachel's vicarious suffering for others found its way in Matthew's Gospel (2: 16-18), and pointed to the massacre of the holy innocents who symbolized the Innocent Lamb who one day would die for all humanity on the Cross. If Rachel wailed for the people, the Lord Jesus will not only weep but will enter into humanity's wounded

[21] Pope Francis, "Abraham, Father in Faith and Hope."

[22] Pope Francis, "Rachel Is Weeping for Her Children," January 4, 2017, Vatican Archives, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170104_udienza-generale.html (accessed on February 7, 2024).

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state, sacrifice himself for all, and thus, give the "definitive Word" of consolation.[23] He will not shed only tears, but every drop of his blood for the world's redemption. Imbibing the same attitude of sharing in others' pains and expressing solidarity with them will enable people today to offer even a little hope to others.

Jonah's Praying Hope

The familiar story of the reluctant prophet Jonah elucidates the relationship between hope and prayer.[24] He was sent on a dangerous mission to a periphery, Nineveh, soon to be destroyed for its lack of faith. During a threatening tempest at sea, after having tried to pray to their gods, the pagan mariners with Jonah challenged him to pray to his God. After exhausting their energies on false gods, they learned to recognize the true God Jonah worshipped. When Jonah voluntarily threw himself at sea to save the crew, these pagans even more openly adhered to the true God. Finally, in Nineveh, Jonah's preaching resonated in the hearts of the population, who he successfully inspired to pray for forgiveness.

Pope Francis reflects here on the imminent danger of death or life-threatening situations, where people find hope through the act of prayer. Even the desire to be spared, when turned into supplication, is not simply self-seeking, but a genuine acknowledgement of frailty and helplessness. God, the loving and merciful Father, obligingly responds to the prayer of his children who beg for salvation in the face of peril or extinction. Even death can be a "surprising occasion to know hope and encounter the Lord."[25] In the darkest of situations, trusting prayer is needed, as it leads forward in hope. God answers the prayer for hope with more hope.

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[23] Pope Francis, "Rachel Is Weeping for Her Children."

[24] Pope Francis, "Jonah: Hope and Prayer," January 18, 2017, Vatican Archives, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170118_udienza-generale.html (accessed on February 10, 2024).

[25] Pope Francis, "Jonah: Hope and Prayer."

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Judith's Intrepid Hope

The Book of Judith touches on a perilous drama, when a Judean city was under siege from a powerful enemy army, and the people were contemplating surrender (Jud 7: 25-26). The end was inevitable and recourse to faith in God was all but useless, at least in the collective consciousness of the fearful Jews. The people could only foresee defeat, death and enslavement. The leader of the people decided to resist for five more days, giving God the chance to intervene miraculously in their favor. But this was a ruse; a weak hope that did not expect a positive outcome but only the worst. Calling on God but not believing he would come to save, there was no hope left among the people.[26]

Surprisingly it was a woman, Judith, a widow of great wisdom and beauty, who revived faith in the hearts of the people, who infused courageous hope to defy their coward hearts. She reproached the people for putting God to the test and instead insisted on total confidence in his love and power. Unfazed at looking like a fool, the strong woman broke down the narrow horizons that put limits on God because of fear and lack of trust. If they truly trusted God, the people needed to pray hard and work hard to achieve their victory. This heroine devised a clever plan to kill the enemy leader and lead God's people to freedom.

B. Fulfillment of Hope: Jesus Christ, the Living Hope

The Incarnate Son, the Source of Hope

While all the Old Testament witnesses encountered a hope that sustained them and accompanied them in the pilgrimage of life, yet their hope is one that awaited fulfillment and completion. God has given the world a foretaste of a gift even more sublime, excellent, and perfect, the one pointed out by St. Paul as "no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared

[26] Pope Francis, "Judith," January 25, 2017, Vatican Archives, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170125_udienza-generale.html (accessed on February 10, 2024).

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for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2: 9). In the mystery of God made human, the promise of God is fulfilled. God in Jesus drew near to his people by divesting himself of his divinity to inaugurate among all men and women, now his brothers and sisters, the plan he envisioned for them. The Lord Jesus came to give a "new hope" to God's people, the hope of eternal life.[27] At his birth, the choir of angels intoned a heavenly tune, signaling that the hope Jesus brought leads to praise and gratitude to God who "initiates a Kingdom of love, justice, and peace."[28]

In his 2016 Midnight Mass homily, Pope Francis described the mystery of the Incarnation as the "mystery of hope and of sadness." There was a "taste of sadness" in that the love manifested that night would not be accepted by all. But there was more, importantly, the "taste of hope." Here was a God who brought light but did not blind people's eyes, who delivered love but did not coerce anyone to accept it, who delivered bread to eat without demanding anything in return. He came to feed and to serve, to give and save.[29] Such hope was immediately noticed and understood by the representatives of those who lived in the margins, who knew their lives were limited by sin and poverty.

The Crucified Lord, Hope in the Power of Love

In his ministry, Jesus attracted the attention of many and the loyalty of faithful disciples. Standing as witnesses to his wonders and learning from his powerful lessons, these men and women found new hope for their lives, for their future. They projected their lofty expectations of a Davidic Messiah on Jesus. However, in just a few short years, all these earthly hopes, weak and selfish, collapsed at the

[27] Pope Francis, "Christ's Birth is the Source of Hope."

[28] Pope Francis, "Christ's Birth is the Source of Hope."

[29] Pope Francis, "Midnight Mass Homily," December 24, 2016, Vatican Archives, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20161224_omelia-natale.html (accessed on February 2, 2024).

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foot of the Cross, perhaps, part of the divine plan to sift and purify the motives of the disciples. With their hopes dashed, a new kind of hope emerged.

Like a tiny grain of wheat that fell on the ground and died before it could bear fruit (Jn. 12: 24), from the Cross of Christ sprung a hope that will never disappear and will last for eternity. The seed of hope was watered, cultivated, and nourished by Jesus' love on the Cross. This love that carried Jesus from the Passion to the Resurrection, was the love that "hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor 13:7), the love that is the life of God, has renewed everything that it touched."[30] On the Cross, hope is reborn and renewed so that humanity may cross from darkness into light, from sinfulness to forgiveness, from disappointment to hope. Unlike fragile earthly hopes, the Crucified Lord offers a new hope fortified by love and therefore capable of overcoming obstacles, of defying even death and sin. Those who accepted the dynamics of the Cross, and learned to be simple and humble like Jesus, became "seeds of hope" to their neighbors, bearers of love that is empowered by hope.[31]

The Risen Christ, Hope of the World

Contrary to the suppositions of the people and the disciples themselves, the hope with which Jesus inaugurated the Kingdom of God on earth did not crumble under the weight of the Cross. And though the Cross gloriously revealed the ineffable divine love infused by hope, this wooden emblem could not contain the explosion of a more glorious mystery. The Resurrection of the Crucified One crystallized the essential message, the very heart, of the Christian faith.

[30] Pope Francis, "General Audience," April 12, 2017, Vatican Archives, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170412_udienza-generale.html (accessed on February, 3, 2024).

[31] Pope Francis, "General Audience," April 12, 2017.

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The Easter event forms the central affirmation of our creed![32] Pope Francis clearly identifies and insists on the Resurrection proclamation – that Christ has died and was buried, that he rose again and appeared to his followers, that he is alive forever! – as the Christological nucleus of the original kerygma.[33]

The Resurrection of Jesus intensified hope in the hearts of the believers. Death was no longer to be feared (1 Cor. 15:55). Humanity's search for God is surpassed by God's original search for us. Grace flows into hearts that are capable of being amazed at the encounter with the Risen One. From this ensue the confident smile and the enthusiasm for proclamation that each Christian must possess in his life. The kerygma, the original proclamation with its simplicity and vitality, was also what Pope Francis recommends as the starting point of every evangelization in the Church today.[34]

C. Furthering Hope: The Church's Mission Today

Homo Viator

Medieval thinkers used the term "*homo viator*" to explain the Christian's onward mobility as a wayfarer, as a pilgrim "on the way" (*in via*) journeying towards the heavenly homeland (*patria*).[35] Pope Francis describes each member of the People of God, as "*homo viator, spe erectus*," always on the move, but also upright (*erectus*) because he or

[32] Pope Francis, "General Audience," April 19, 2017, Vatican Archives, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170419_udienza-generale.html (accessed on March 5, 2024).

[33] See Raniero Cantalamessa, "The Year of Faith and the Catechism of the Catholic Church," December 7, 2012 in Father Raniero Cantalamessa Website, available at http://www.cantalamessa.org/?p=1876&lang=en (accessed on March 1, 2024).

[34] See Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Pasay City, Philippines: Paulines, 2013), nos. 160-175.

[35] David Eliott, 123.

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she walks in hope.[36] When the Lord Jesus gave the disciples the Great Commission to proclaim the Good News, he ended the exhortation with the promise redolent with hope: "I am with you always, to the end of the world" (Mt. 28:20).

Every person has a migratory spirit that carries him or her on a journey in life that is fraught with challenges and hardships along the way. But for Christians, the journey is not a lonely trek because the Lord does not only precede him but accompanies him at every step. This mysterious presence of God, through trials, darkness, and need, manifests in Divine Providence.[37] Christian hope is symbolized by an anchor (Heb. 6: 18-19) because it is not vague or uncertain or unreal. It is based on the firm promise made by Christ and on what he has already accomplished. The assurance of Jesus enables his people to walk upright as they journey in hope.

The Holy Spirit and Hope

While the Church's confidence in God is symbolized by an anchor that signifies the stability of the Lord's promise of his abiding presence and help, another helpful image of hope is the sail of a ship, representing movement, advancement, and driving force.[38] Hope is like a sail, and the wind that propels it to uncharted waters or to safe harbor is the power of the Holy Spirit.[39] "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (Rom. 15: 13). The Holy Spirit

[36] Pope Francis, "General Audience," April 26, 2017, Vatican Archives, available athttps://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170426_udienza-generale.html (accessed on February 29, 2024).

[37] Pope Francis, "General Audience," April 26, 2017.

[38] Pope Francis, "General Audience," May 31, 2017, Vatican Archives, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170531_udienza-generale.html_(accessed on February 15, 2022).

[39] Pope Francis, "General Audience," May 31, 2017.

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enables Christian hope to abound, especially in situations when it is easier to give up, when the temptation to be sedentary and immobile is great. The Holy Spirit makes hope possible by reminding people that they are God's children and heirs of a "hope that does not disappoint" (Rom. 5:5).

The Holy Spirit encourages Christians to break from self-enclosure and timidity and to be like him – other paracletes – willing to comfort and protect the weak, the poor, the castaway. In other words, the Holy Spirit transforms men and women from recipients "abounding" in hope to "sowers of hope" in others, in the world, and in the whole of creation.[40]

Models of Hope

If there are prophetic witnesses of hope in the Old Testament, Pope Francis offers models of hope for today's Christians in the persons of the saints and martyrs, and in particular the two women of hope, the two Mary's. First, he invites us to look at Mary, the mother of Jesus, the mother of Hope.[41] Mary's hope spanned the whole of her life, in her humble acceptance of the uncertainties of life as a young unwed mother, as a grieving mother at the foot of the Cross, and as a mother to the gathered disciples waiting for the promised Holy Spirit. In the story of Jesus, she appears with hardly a dialogue, and quietly disappears. Then when she seemed to be lost in oblivion, she reappears in her usual silence and reassuring presence. She has perfected her hope through listening to God for "there is a great connection between hope and listening."[42]

[40] Pope Francis, "General Audience," May 31, 2017.

[41] Pope Francis, "General Audience," May 10, 2017, Vatican Archives, available athttps://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170510_udienza-generale.html (accessed on March 1, 2024).

[42] Pope Francis, "General Audience," May 10, 2017.

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Second, the Pope points to the example of Mary Magdalene who he calls the "apostle of the new and greatest hope."[43] Mary Magdalene was a person prone to disappointments for she lived her early life at the mercy of evil. She carried a baggage of failures and experienced so much suffering that many people today can identify with her struggles. But her misery turned into a revolution of love, forgiveness, and change. In the end, Mary Magdalene was privileged to bear the joy of the Resurrection and as a woman apostle, spread the Good News even to the other apostles themselves. Her life is a testament to the possibility that we too, "can be saints because the Lord created us; he is the One who helps us."[44]

Pope Francis' catechetical presentation of hope shows that for him, the horizon within which to grasp this virtue is God himself. The Heavenly Father is the source of hope.[45] Hope is born out of a loving Father's invitation to trust his plan and vision for the life of the individual and for the world as seen in the hope of Abraham. Hope, like faith and charity, are firmly anchored on faith in Jesus' death and resurrection and therefore sealed with a love that is genuine, sincere, and eternal. Hope becomes alive in the heart of a person who invites the Holy Spirit, who provides abundant hope, to rule his life for "as long as there is hope, there is life" and he who "needs hope in order to live needs the Holy Spirit in order to hope."[46]

Pope Francis believes that understanding and possessing hope is vital to every person in the world today because there are enemies

[43] Pope Francis, "General Audience," May 17, 2017, Vatican Archives, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170517_udienza-generale.html (accessed on February 17, 2022).

[44] Pope Francis, "General Audience," June 21, 2017, Vatican Archives, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170621_udienza-generale.html (accessed on February 15, 2022).

[45] Pope Francis, "General Audience," June 21, 2017,

[46] Pope Francis, "General Audience," May 31, 2017.

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around us that seek to destroy it. A difficult present with its many trials can crush hope. A reluctance to encounter others and invite them to share the journey together is a sign of lack of hope. Complacency and self-satisfaction with one's achievements, wealth, and comfort close the doors to the desire for change and vigilant waiting for God's action in one's life, in others and in the world. Despair is an enemy of hope.[47] But with hope, ordinary Christians can be missionaries in words, conduct and testimony of daily life.[48] They learn the value of patience, the necessary condition of hope especially, in the midst of suffering.[49] All these lessons would prove providentially necessary and relevant in the trying years ahead marked by the surprise of a pandemic and, once it is over, of the trauma from its aftermath.

Hope for a Changing World

After having been first detected in China in late 2019, the World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a global pandemic in March the following year.[50] What followed was a series of strict national lockdowns as countries closed their borders

[47] Pope Francis, "General Audience," September 27, 2017, Vatican Archives, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170927_udienza-generale.html (accessed on March 1, 2024).

[48] Pope Francis, "General Audience," October 4, 2017, Vatican Archives, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20171004_udienza-generale.html (accessed on March 1, 2024).

[49] Pope Francis, "General Audience," October 11, 2017, Vatican Archives, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20171011_udienza-generale.html (accessed on March 1, 2024).

[50] Edison Macusi, John Kenny Rafon, and Erna Macusi, "Impact of COVID-19 and Closed Fishing Season on Commercial Fishers of Davao Gulf, Mindanao, Philippines," in National Center for Biotechnology Information Website (December 9, 2021), available at https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9759402/ (accessed on March 1, 2024).

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and controlled the mobility of their populations. However, what was happening worldwide was immediately visible in both conventional and social media. Who could easily forget the long lines of frenzied shoppers, overcrowded hospitals, shut-down factories and offices, the long lines of rushed funeral and crematory services, and the upsurge in online services of institutions, including churches, which were lumped together with the so-called non-essentials?

An extraordinary event happened in Rome's St. Peter Square in the evening of March 27, 2020.[51] It was extraordinary because the religious service was Pope Francis' most striking response to the global crisis by means of a sacred ritual.[52] It was also extraordinary in the sense that he performed it alone in the vast silence of an empty patio; a solitary figure in white, praying before images of a miraculous Crucifix and an icon of Mary, *Salus Populi Romani*, for the healing of the world. He gave a Eucharistic Benediction to all people of good will and delivered a poignant address that moved even sceptics and critics to admiration and respect.[53] In his speech that night, and in succeeding public as well as private messages, the Pope intended to first, suggest guidelines for "rebuilding a better world that might be born from this crisis of humanity."[54] Secondly, Pope Francis wanted to sow the seeds of hope

[51] Cindy Wooden, Covid-19 Is not God's Judgment, but a Call to Live Differently, Pope Says," National Catholic Reporter Website (March 27, 2020), available at https://www.ncronline.org/vatican/covid-19-not-gods-judgment-call-live-differently-pope-says (accessed on March 1, 2024).

[52] Paul Elie, "Pope Francis and the Coronavirus Pandemic During the Easter Holy Week," The New Yorker (April 10, 2020), available at https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/pope-francis-and-the-coronavirus-pandemic-during-the-easter-holy-week (accessed on March 1, 2024).

[53] Victor Manuel Pérez-Martinez, "The Message of Pope Francis in Time of Pandemic: Engagement and Sentiment on Twitter," *Church, Communication and Culture* 7:1 (2022), in Taylor and Francis Online website (May 10. 2022), available at https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23753234.2022.2040372 (accessed on March 1, 2024).

[54] Michael Czerny, "Preface," Pope Francis, *Life After Pandemic* ebook (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2020), 3.

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in God, with whom "life never dies."[55] He sought to strengthen the faith of people in the Risen Christ as he exhorted them to believe that "we have an anchor: by his cross we have been saved. We have a rudder: by his cross we have been redeemed. We have a hope: by his cross we have been healed and embraced so that nothing and no one can separate us from his redeeming love."[56]

The Jubilee Year 2025 comes two years since the declaration of the official end of the pandemic,[57] and thus the task of rising from its ashes has already begun in many sectors of society. Reeling from the socio-economic, political and health setbacks the pandemic left in its tracks, there are fresh challenges that the Church and the rest of the world need to confront. For Pope Francis, this is the right time to push for a momentum of hope and not forget the lessons the pandemic taught the world.

In his interview book with Austin Ivereigh, *Let us Dream*, the Pope discussed the promising channels of hope he sees in the future: the involvement of women, the growing sense of solidarity, support for human dignity, care for creation and for every person.[58] Pope Benedict XVI has written an excellent encyclical on hope, *Spe Salvi*[59], but the leading theologian of hope Jurgen Moltmann found Benedict's vision

[55] Czerny, "Preface," Pope Francis, Life After Pandemic ebook.

[56] Pope Francis, "Extraordinary Moment of Prayer," March 27, 2020, Vatican Archives, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/urbi/documents/papa-francesco_20200327_urbi-et-orbi-epidemia.html (accessed on March 1, 2024).

[57] Jennier Rigby and Bhanvi Satija, WHO Declares End to Covid Global Health Emergency," *Reuters* website (May 8, 2023) available at https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/covid-is-no-longer-global-health-emergency-who-2023-05-05/ (accessed on March 1, 2024).

[58] See Pope Francis and Austin Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream* ebook (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020).

[59] Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, November 30, 2007, Vatican Archives, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html (accessed March 6, 2024).

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and audience limited and parochial, and even forgetful of the spirit of Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*.[60] Pope Francis has not elaborated a new systematic theology of hope, yet his pastoral vision of hope extends from every Christian believer to every person alive in the planet, from human life to every form of created reality. While not mentioning *Gaudium et Spes*, he is clearly treading along its line of reasoning. Pope Francis includes in his vision of hope the dream of human solidarity in the process of the development of an international community imbued with the values of the Kingdom. For him, hope is not a passive expectation of a glorious end from the hand of God but an active pursuit of the improvement of this world guided by the spirit of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This will certainly be the unique contribution of Pope Francis in the area of the theology of hope: proclaiming hope by teaching and exhorting people to discover it, but also leading people to rebuild their lives and the world with a robust and fulfilled hope in the God who does not disappoint, in the God who comes to save all.

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[60] Jurgen Moltmann, "Horizons of Hope: A Critique of Spe Salvi," *The Christian Century* website (May 20, 2008), available at https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2008-05/horizons-hope (accessed on March 1, 2024).

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