

HOPE

When we speak of hope, we confront the most profound questions in life: What is the purpose of human existence? What is the ultimate meaning of life? In other words, why are we here? What do we live for?

The quest for a satisfactory answer to these questions has baffled thinkers and philosophers from ages past. It is also the unspoken enigma of the man in the street. The answer has long been known, but is oftentimes denied or ignored. Worse still, today's generation has ceased to bother about the whole thing, largely because people are complacently happy with the way things are. We find ourselves in the midst of a hope-less generation. If only people would transcend themselves. If only they could look beyond the material world.

To be sure, everybody feels fulfilled when he or she is happy. Only a fool would take this proposition to task. But where does happiness lie? Is it in having a lot of money? Shall we equate happiness with fame, erudition, or beauty? Does excellent health immunize one from sadness? So where does happiness lurk?

We constantly experience the insufficiency of things. People are not up to what we expect of them. Our plans are not followed. Goals are left unfulfilled. Not everything we want is available. Things do not turn out as we imagined. Indeed, the very opposite happens at times. Even if we foresee things, we are simply not in control of the future. If we are not ready to face failures and setbacks, to whom do we turn to in this world?

We do not mean to paint a bleak picture of the world to sow pessimism. But it behooves to draw everyone's attention to the emptiness of worldly promises, the futility of human hopes that we might fix our gaze to eternity. You and I have a vocation to happiness, not like the one the world can give, but eternal happiness.

Our life is like a golf ball. If it were all smooth, it won't go very far, at most fifty or so meters. But thanks to its multiple dimples, it can reach thrice as far. Why? It's aerodynamics. In the spiritual life, if everything is smooth and easy, how can we obtain merits? How can we show our love and prove our fidelity? It's in the midst of difficulties that we grow tough, it's in the face of human uncertainties that we firm up our hope in God. That's spiritual dynamics.

People without hope are afraid of life and death. Life, because of its pains and perplexities. Death, because it seals definitively one's fate. The inconstancy of hopeless individuals paralyzes them, rendering them incapable to make serious commitments. If there is anything fixed in their life, it is their cycle of decision and indecision, certainty and doubt, firmness and hesitation. It does not make a lot of sense to strive for anything in this world if we did not have a clear goal in life. We would just be floating in the air, like a fallen leaf, driven by the winds of caprice, errors and uncertainties.

The drama of human life, with its joys and sorrows, triumphs and defeats, makes us long for eternal rest. The insufficiency and finitude of everything that surrounds us only bring to the fore our innate desire for total happiness. We look forward to the day when we finally leave this valley of tears and move to a new abode, there where we possess the true Life. For the moment, though, we've got to put our feet on the ground and work on, without taking our eyes off the object of our hope.

I've read in the papers that a group of mountaineers scaling Mt. Everest signed a waiver stating that should any member of the expedition fall down during the ascent, he would be left behind; his comrades, it was presumed, would be too weak to carry him along. Once you join the climb, you're on your own for much of it. Not so in the spiritual life. Besides the help of your brothers

in the faith, Jesus will never abandon you and just walk away. He'll carry you on his shoulders, he'll stay with you; he is your strength, your support, your hope.

Nobody is ever defeated until we think we are. Life, our whole life, is a struggle. If we are determined to go on, to slug it out, confident that Our Lord will sustain us, we are sure to triumph. Let us ask God to fill up our heart with the unstinting desire to be united to Him. Nourish in your heart the ultimate nostalgia of Christian hope. Trust in Our Lord, in the power of his grace and the richness of his mercy. When your soul is enveloped in darkness, when your life is soured by bitterness and disappointments, turn your eyes on Him with greater confidence. He has come "that we may have life and have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:10).