

3. January 2022

The virtue of hope

1 Jn 2:29-3:6

If you know that he is upright you must recognise that everyone whose life is upright is a child of his. You must see what great love the Father has lavished on us by letting us be called God's children - which is what we are! The reason why the world does not acknowledge us is that it did not acknowledge him. My dear friends, we are already God's children, but what we shall be in the future has not yet been revealed. We are well aware that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he really is. Whoever treasures this hope of him purifies himself, to be as pure as he is. Whoever sins, acts wickedly, because all sin is wickedness. Now you are well aware that he has appeared in order to take sins away, and that in him there is no sin. No one who remains in him sins, and whoever sins has neither seen him nor recognised him.

Through the Holy Spirit, we recognise that we are children of God, and we know that we are loved by a benevolent Father, whose greatest desire is that we should know his love, that we should accept it in ourselves and reciprocate it.

But what are we to be? As St. John says, it has not yet become clear what we will be, but only in eternity will we recognise it in fullness. But already now we can draw great spiritual benefit from practising the virtue of hope, because through it we adhere to the Lord already in this life, even if we do not yet see clearly what we will be. Thus, this theological virtue enables us to have part with the One in whom we hope, who is the Lord Himself.

Let us take an example: We, as Christians, have the hope that in eternity we will live intimately united with God. This reality, even if we cannot yet see it, begins to become effective in our lives through the virtue of hope. The more we hope in this eternity that has been promised to us, the more we orient ourselves towards it, the more we will be united to God from now on, and from this comes the strength to better fulfil our mission in this world.

While hope unites us profoundly to the Lord and thus sanctifies us, sin produces the opposite. It damages the life of grace and, in the long run, destroys it. It takes away the naturalness of innocence and prevents us from abiding in God and knowing Him as He really is. While hope opens our eyes to see without seeing, sin makes us increasingly blind to the truth. It enslaves us and turns our life into an illusion, as it turns it further and further away from the reality of God.

It is wise, then, to put our hope in the Lord, trusting in His promises and holding fast to them. Then our hope will be well founded, whereas earthly hopes are often unfulfilled, and when we place too many expectations on people, we are likely to be disappointed.

As we look ahead to the year that has just begun, it is important in the first instance to be realistic. A great shadow continues to hang over many nations. The human promises that, with an intensive vaccination campaign, the virus would soon be defeated and people would be protected, turned out to be a false hope.

So how can this shadow be lifted?

Let us put our hope in the Lord! He is the only sure thing in the year that has begun. We have already experienced how almost everything earthly can be shaken. Christian prudence teaches us to draw the right conclusions from this experience.

If we pay attention to two aspects, the shadow will have to give way: in the first instance, let us put our hope in the Lord, asking Him to put an end to this nightmare. Secondly, let us cooperate with Him so that His light will spread. This happens when we ourselves turn ever more deeply and sincerely to God and, at the same time, invite others to open themselves to the love of our Heavenly Father.

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