SPIRITUAL MESSAGE FOR NOVEMBER 2008

"Where there is Despair, let me sow Hope"

What is hope? It is a theological virtue that makes us desire God as our highest Good, so that we expect, with a firm confidence, eternal happiness and the means to attain it. We have this conviction because of God's goodness and power. Hope is infused into our soul with faith and charity when we are baptised. It is a firm and confident expectation because of God's faithfulness to his promises.

Jesus told us when he was here in earth: "He who perseveres to the end shall be saved" (Matt 24:13). "Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find…. Knock and the door will be opened to you…. If a son asks for bread, will he give him a stone?" (Lk 11:9-11). Jesus in heaven is constantly interceding for us with the Father, and this assurance should give us great confidence and hope!

Divine hope excludes anxiety and worry, though it is tempered with a salutary fear, because we realize our human weakness. We are not presumptuous because we also realize God's goodness and power and love. St. John Chrysostom suggests that all our most grievous sins, set side by side with God's mercy, are but a cobweb which is blown away by a single puff of wind. This thought is not an incentive to commit sin, which is always evil in the sight of God, but it is a strong statement of the infinite mercy of God, which is above all his works!

It would be presumption on our part if we hope for heaven without divine help, or without good works, or if we sin because of God's mercy.

Our aim should be the growth of divine hope within us by using all the helps available to us. Let us begin with the psalms. In Psalm 55(56), we read: "Have mercy on me God, men crush me, they fight me all day long and oppress me. My foes crush me all day long, for many fight proudly against me. When I fear, I will trust in you, in God whose word I praise. In God I trust, I shall not fear: what can mortal man do to me? All day long they distort my words, all their thought is to harm me….You have kept a record of my tears, are they not written in your book? Then my foes will be put to flight, on the day that I call to you. This I know, that God is on my side. In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not fear, what can mortal man do to me.?" How beautifully the psalmist expresses hope and confidence in God in this and in so many of the psalms!

If we look at the many stories and parables in the New Testament, we see clearly how God wants us to trust and hope in his help. Before Jesus calmed the storm (Mk 4:35-4l), while he was in the boat with the apostles they underestimated his awareness of the situation and thought he was asleep. But he said to them: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" If their faith was weak, their

hope of safety in the treacherous storm would also have faded away! But in Psalm 145 we pray: “The Lord is faithful in all his words and loving in all his deeds. The Lord supports all who fall and raises all who are bowed down. The eyes of all creatures look to you and you give them their food in due time. You open wide your hand and grant the desires of all who live.”

Among the stories of St. Francis, we read that he had terrible pain in his eyes for some fifty days and could not sleep. In his prayer, he heard the words: “Francis, if all the earth were gold, and the rocks precious stones, and the rivers ran with choicest balsam, and then if you were to find so precious a treasure that in comparison with it the gold were as vile as dust, the jewels of less price than common pebbles, and the balsam less valuable than water…and if all this were given to you as a reward for your present illness, would you not regard these sufferings precious and rejoice at them?” Francis replied: “I do not deserve such a treasure.” The Lord continued: “This priceless treasure is life everlasting which I have prepared for you, the pledge of which I give you in this infirmity.” The Saint rejoiced, he was encouraged and said: “Such is the happiness I seek, that every pain is delightful to me!”

St. Vincent de Paul once said: “Even if the entire world were to rise up to destroy us, it could do nothing but what is pleasing to God, in whom we have placed our hope …You point out to me your miseries. And who is there that is not full of them? The only thing is to know them and to love the humiliation arising from them, as you do, without stopping except to lay the strong foundation of confidence in God. Then the house is built upon rock, and when the storm comes, it remains firm!”

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