

An illustration of the Nativity scene. The Virgin Mary, in a white and gold robe, holds the infant Jesus, who is wrapped in a yellow cloth. Joseph, in a blue robe, stands behind them, his hands resting on the child. The background features a night sky with a large, glowing yellow sun or moon, several bright yellow stars, and a town with lit-up windows and a church spire on a hill.

PILGRIMS OF HOPE

ADVENT REFLECTIONS
FOR THE JUBILEE YEAR BY

POPE FRANCIS

PILGRIMS OF HOPE

As we prepare ourselves as “Pilgrims of Hope” to enter into the spirit of the Jubilee Year that begins on Christmas Eve with the opening of the Holy Door of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, the customary Advent themes of expectation and hope help us focus on the meaning of our Christian pilgrimage, which, as Pope Francis reminds us, is “Seeking Jesus, encountering Jesus, following Jesus, of going to abide where he lives, in order to listen to his Word of life.”

Our pilgrimage is both an outer journey to meet the risen Christ, and an inner journey with Christ as we deepen our relationship with him. Thus Pope Francis desires that this Jubilee Year be a time “to encourage and sustain the hope that guides our steps towards the goal of a genuine, personal encounter with the risen Lord Jesus, who is not only the destination of our earthly pilgrimage but also a constant presence in our lives.”

And as the celebration of the divine incarnation at Christmas, to which our Advent steps lead, reminds us, God does not just want to be with us in some external way, but wants to come to dwell within us—the real meaning of “sanctifying grace,” God’s own life through the Holy Spirit throbbing within us, enlivening us and preparing us for an eternal life in union with God. So each day this Advent, through our reflection on the words of Pope Francis, our meditation on the selected Scripture passages, our prayer of intimate conversation with God and our actions in imitation of Jesus, we will draw closer and closer on our pilgrimage to encounter the One who calls us to intimacy, always walks with us, and wants desperately to dwell within us. “Come, Lord, Jesus, come!” (Rev 22:20)

—*Steve Mueller, Editor*

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ADVENT: A TIME OF EXPECTATION & HOPE

“Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us.”

(Rom 5:5)



Advent, which prepares us for Christmas, is a time of expectation and hope in which we focus our attention on our encounter with Jesus, first during our life and then at its end when we will meet him face to face. For a Christian the most important thing is

the continuous encounter with the Lord, our being with the Lord until we ultimately meet him at our death. The Lord comes every day, so that, with his grace, we might accomplish good in our own lives and in the lives of others. Our God is a God-who-comes, who continually comes. Our waiting will not be disappointed by God who never disappoints. God might perhaps make us wait a few moments in the dark to allow our expectation to ripen, but God never disappoints. The Lord always comes so is always by our side. At times God does not make himself seen, but God always comes. Thus, particularly in this season of Advent, which is the time of waiting, in which we prepare ourselves to welcome once again the comforting mystery of the Incarnation and the light of Christmas, it is important to reflect on hope. We must not let hope abandon us, because God, with his love, walks with us. Let us allow the Lord to teach us what it means to hope.

*What do I most want to happen this Advent
to deepen my experience of God in my life?*

ADVENT: A CONTINUOUS CALL TO HOPE

*“For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it
as the LORD our God is to us?” (Dt 4:7)*

*A*dvent is a continuous call to hope: it reminds us that God is present in history to lead it to its ultimate goal and to lead us to its fullness, which is the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ. God is present in the history of humanity, “God-with-us” and not distant. God is always with us, to the extent that very often God knocks on the door of our heart (Rev 3:20). God walks beside us to support us. Each one of us can say: “I hope, I have hope, because God walks with me.” The Lord does not abandon us but accompanies us through the events of our lives to help us discover the meaning of the journey and the meaning of everyday life, to give us courage when we are under duress or when we suffer. Let us look to Jesus who always walks beside us, who accepts our frailties, shares our efforts and rests his firm and gentle arm on our weak shoulders. In the midst of life’s storms, God always extends his hand to us and frees us from threats. How fortunate are we to have this grace of having God close to us. We await God, we hope that God manifests himself, but at the same time, God too hopes that we manifest ourselves to him!

*When and how have I most experienced God and Jesus
with me during the last few months?*

LIFE IS JOURNEY TO MEET JESUS

“Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.” (Mk 2:17)



Life is a journey to meet Jesus now and at the end of our earthly life. A journey in which we do not encounter Jesus is not a Christian journey. It is for the Christian to continually encounter Jesus, to watch him, to let oneself be watched over by Jesus, because Jesus watches us with love. He loves us so much and is always watching over us. To encounter Jesus also means allowing oneself to be gazed upon by him. “But, Father,” one might say, “you know that this journey is horrible for me, I am such a sinner, so how can I dare encounter Jesus?” Yet in his ministry, the people whom Jesus most sought out were the greatest sinners! So some people—those who believed themselves righteous—criticized him saying “this is no true prophet, look what lovely company he keeps! He was eating and drinking with sinners.”) And Jesus replied: “I came for those in need of salvation, in need of healing.” And in our lives Jesus always comes to forgive us—we are all sinners—and heal us. And the Sacrament of Reconciliation in which we receive this forgiveness is an encounter with Jesus activating one again his power to forgive. Encountering Christ, letting ourselves be caught up in and guided by his love, enlarges the horizons of our existence and gives us a firm hope which will not disappoint. Hope is living for our encounter with Jesus and God.

*What do I most need to do now to renew my hope
for meeting with Jesus and God?*

THE JOURNEY OF HOPE BEGINS WITH DESIRE

*“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth...
but store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroys,
nor thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is,
there also will your heart be. (Mt 6:19-21)*

Everyone knows what it is to hope. In the heart of each person, hope dwells as the desire and expectation of good things to come, despite our not knowing what the future may bring. We are called to journey towards Jesus, which always begins with a deep desire and inner zeal. The crisis of faith in our lives and in our societies also has to do with the eclipse of desire for God. It is related to a slumbering of the spirit, to the habit of being content to live from day to day, without ever asking what God really wants from us. Sated with plenty of things, we fail to hunger for God and let the longing for greater things evaporate. To desire means to look beyond what is immediate and visible and embrace life as a mystery that surpasses us and beckons us to look into the future. For that is the way God made us: brimming with desire. With no exaggeration, we can say that we are what we desire. For it is our desires that enlarge our gaze and drive our lives forward, beyond the barriers of habit, beyond banal consumerism, beyond a drab and dreary faith, beyond the fear of becoming involved and serving others and the common good. Hope, if it is to grow, has to begin ever anew. It needs to be sparked by a holy desire to take up the challenge of entering into a living and lively relationship with God.

*How do my desires reveal what my hopes really are?
Where does my hope to meet Christ rank?*

RENEWING OUR DESIRE TO MEET CHRIST

*“Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near.
Let the wicked forsake their way, and sinners their thoughts.
Let them turn to the LORD to find mercy; to our God,
who is generous in forgiving.” (Is 55:6-7)*

*I*n the journey of life and faith, desire leads us to adoration and adoration renews our desire. For our desire for God can only grow when we place ourselves in his presence. For Jesus alone heals our desires. From what? From the tyranny of needs. Indeed, our hearts grow sickly whenever our desires coincide merely with our needs. God, on the other hand, elevates our desires, purifying them and healing them of selfishness, opening them to love for him and for our brothers and sisters. Let us set out anew on the path towards Christ. Let us not give apathy and resignation the power to drive us into a cheerless and banal existence. Let our restless hearts embrace the restlessness of the Spirit. The world expects from believers a new burst of enthusiasm for the things of heaven. The season of Advent presents us with a message full of hope and reawakens in us the memory of Christ’s historical coming and the expectation of his glorious return. During these four weeks we are called to leave behind a resigned and routine way of life and to go forth, nourishing hope, nourishing dreams for a new future to encounter God, and simultaneously to let ourselves be encountered by him. As restless seekers of union with God and pilgrims of hope, let us remain open to God’s surprises.

How might I renew my desire to be more deeply united with Jesus?

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

“Jesus turned and saw two of John the Baptist’s disciples following him and said to them, ‘What are you looking for?’ They said to him, ‘Rabbi’ (which translated means Teacher), ‘where are you staying?’ He said to them, ‘Come, and you will see.’” (John 1:38-39)



The journey of faith for disciples of all times begins with the question that Jesus asks the two who, urged by the Baptist, set out to follow him: “What do you seek?” (v. 38). Each of us, as a human being, is seeking: seeking happiness, seeking love, a good and full life.

God the Father has given us all this in his Son Jesus. Only the encounter with Jesus can give full meaning to our life and render our plans and our initiatives fruitful. It is not enough to build an image of God based on the words that are heard; one must go in search of the divine Master. The life of faith consists in the wish to abide in the Lord, and thus in a continuing search for the place where he lives. This means that we are called to surpass a methodical and predictable religiosity, rekindling the encounter with Jesus in prayer, in meditating on the Word of God and in practicing the Sacraments, in order to abide with him and bear fruit thanks to him, to his help and to his grace. Seeking Jesus, encountering Jesus, following Jesus, of going to abide where he lives, in order to listen to his Word of life, to adhere to him who takes away the sin of the world, to recover in him hope and spiritual inspiration. This is our journey.

*How would I answer Jesus’ question about
what am I looking for from him?*

MEETING JESUS FOR THE FIRST TIME

“Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?” (Mt 25:37-39)

There is something we often struggle to talk about which is the most beautiful thing we have to share: our own personal encounter with Jesus. Whether we recognized it at the time or only later, each of us has had a first encounter with Jesus, whether as a child, as an adolescent, as a young person or as an adult. Each of us could say so much about how the Lord has touched us, and share the unique moments in which we perceived the risen Lord alive and close, who kindled joy in our hearts or dried our tears, who transmitted confidence and consolation, strength and enthusiasm, or forgiveness and tenderness. We need to share these encounters in the family, in the community, with friends. It does good to talk about the good inspirations that have guided us in life, the good thoughts and feelings that help us so much to go forward, and also about our efforts and labors to understand and to progress in the life of faith. Jesus invites us to share in his joy, to live and to offer with joy every moment of our life, by making it become at the same time a gift of love for the people around us. If we understand this, everything changes. Many men and women still live with closed hearts. We must open our hearts and be ready for surprises, that is, for an unexpected change in ourselves and our lives.

*When did I first experience Jesus inviting me
to a more personal relationship?*

RECALLING OUR FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS

“LORD, you have probed me, you know me... Behind and before you encircle me and rest your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, far too lofty for me to reach.” (Ps 139:1, 5-6)



Every authentic encounter with Jesus remains alive in the memory and is never forgotten. The Lord always brings us back to the first encounter, to the first moment when he looked at us, spoke to us and aroused within us the desire to follow him. A true encounter with Jesus remains forever. Let us consider this experience of meeting Christ who calls us to remain with him. Each one of God's calls is an initiative of his love for God always takes the initiative. God calls you to life, to faith and to a particular state in life: “I want you here.” God's first call is to life, through which God makes us persons, which is an individual and personal call. Then God calls us to faith and to become part of God's family as children of God. Lastly, God calls us to a particular state in life where we are to use our gifts. They are different ways of realizing the loving design that God has for each one of us. And the greatest joy for every believer is to respond to that call when Jesus looked at you with love and said: “This is your path;” when Jesus through so many people made me understand the path of the Gospel and not some other worldly path with other values. We must never forget our first encounter that was so crucial, so complete, that it changed our lives.

What do you most recall about your “call” or invitation to follow Jesus in a more adult way?

JESUS OUR PILGRIMAGE COMPANION

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?” (Lk 24:32)

A person is a Christian because he or she has met Jesus or has allowed themselves to meet with him. We were born with a seed of restlessness. God wanted it like this: an anxiety to find fullness, an anxiety to find God. So often even without knowing that we have this concern our hearts are restless, thirsty for an encounter with God. We look for it many times on the wrong road and then when lost, we return to look for him again. On the other hand, God thirsts to meet us, so much so that he sent Jesus to meet us, to come and satisfy this divine desire. Jesus walks with us and takes upon himself our fears, our problems and our sufferings, even those which are deepest and most painful. There is an ancient rule of pilgrims that says that the real pilgrim must go at the pace of the slowest person in the group. And Jesus does this, not accelerating but waiting for us to take the first step. So the encounter happens. But the encounter embraces the entire journey. We meet Jesus in the darkness of our doubts. Even in the ugly doubt of our sins, he is always with us to help us in our anxieties. The Lord accompanies us because he wants to meet us, to listen to us and respond. That is why we say that the core of Christianity is an encounter with Jesus. He’s our pilgrimage companion.

*How can I find more time to welcome Jesus
as a constant companion in my life?*

SEEKING THE FACE OF GOD

“Let hearts that seek the LORD rejoice! Seek out the LORD and his might; constantly seek his face. Recall the wondrous deeds God has done, his wonders and words of judgment.” (Ps 105:3-5)



The quest to seek the face of God is fundamental for the life of every believer, for we have come to realize that our ultimate goal in life is the encounter with God. To see the merciful face of God, the Father who has given us Jesus, is our destination and the guiding star that helps us not to lose our way. Abundance, prosperity and wealth often cause us to drift away from the Lord and fill us instead with falsehood and injustice. The culture of comfort, which makes us think only of ourselves, makes us insensitive to the cries of other people. Today we need a renewed summons to conversion, a call to turn our eyes to the Lord and recognize his face. Our efforts to seek the face of God are born of the desire for an encounter with the Lord, a personal encounter with God's immense love, with God's saving power. This kind of personal encounter with Jesus Christ is possible also for us who are the disciples of the third millennium. In our effort to seek the Lord's face, we must learn to look closely, beneath the surface, and to recognize him in the faces of the poor, the sick, the abandoned, and the foreigners whom God places on our way. This encounter becomes also for us a time of grace and salvation, and summons us to continue the mission that Jesus entrusted to us his disciples.

*What do I most need to do to seek greater union
and reorient my life toward God?*

MOVING ALWAYS TOWARD THE HORIZON OF HOPE

“Although you have not seen Christ you love him; even though you do not see him now yet believe in him, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, as you attain the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” (1 Pet 1:8-9)

*L*ife itself is a pilgrimage, and the human being is a pilgrim traveling along the road, making his way to the desired destination. Where are we journeying? Is there a common goal? And what is this goal? Ours is a universal pilgrimage toward a common goal, a kingdom of justice, love and peace. This journey never comes to an end. Just as in each of our lives we always need to begin again, to get up again, to rediscover the meaning of the goal of our lives, so also for the great human family it is always necessary to rediscover the common horizon toward which we are journeying. The horizon of hope makes for a good journey. The season of Advent restores this horizon of hope, a hope which does not disappoint for it is founded on the promises of God's Word. I invite everyone to a renewed hope, for hope speaks to us of something deeply rooted in every human heart, independently of our circumstances and historical conditioning. Hope speaks to us of a thirst, an aspiration, a longing for a life of fulfillment, a desire to achieve great things that fill our heart and lift our spirit to lofty realities like truth, goodness and beauty, justice and love. Hope is bold; it can look beyond personal convenience, the petty securities and compensations which limit our horizon, and it can open us up to grand ideals that make life more beautiful and worthwhile. Let us continue, then, to advance along the paths of hope.

*When and how have I most experienced
a longing to be united with God?*

AMBASSADORS OF HOPE

“Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” (Rom 15:7)



Our destination is the kingdom of God, which God himself inaugurated on this earth and which must be extended until its fulfillment, when Christ, our life, shall appear. The goal is full communion with the Lord, familiarity with the Lord, entry into his own divine life, where we will live in the joy of his love beyond measure, a full joy. This is the hope that awakens us each morning. We believe that every affection, every friendship, every good yearning, every love, even the most minute and neglected, one day will find fulfillment in God. This is the power that spurs us to embrace our daily life with enthusiasm. And this is our hope: to live in hope and live in light, in the light of God the Father, in the light of Jesus the savior, in the light of the Holy Spirit who urges us to go forth in life. Our task is to proclaim and to bring God's salvation to this world of ours, so often led astray, in need of answers that give courage, hope and new vigor for the journey. May we be ambassadors of God's mercy and hope, to build God's kingdom now in ourselves, our families and our communities, and to make all feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to follow the way leading to God by living a life according to the Gospel.

How might my daily life most change because of my desire for greater union with God?

JOYOUS HERALDS OF MERCY & HOPE

“Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” (Lk 24:47)

The Gospel allows you to know the real Jesus, the living Jesus. It speaks to your heart and changes your life. The Gospel is the real antidote to spiritual destitution. Wherever we go, we are called as Christians to proclaim the liberating news that forgiveness for sins committed is possible, that God is greater than our sinfulness, that God freely loves us at all times and that we were made for communion and eternal life with God. The Lord asks us to be joyous heralds of this message of mercy and hope. It is thrilling to experience the joy of spreading this good news, sharing the treasure entrusted to us, consoling broken hearts and offering hope to our brothers and sisters experiencing darkness. It means following and imitating Jesus, who sought out the poor and sinners as a shepherd lovingly seeks his lost sheep. In union with Jesus, we can courageously open up new paths of evangelization and the promotion of human dignity. Therefore, let us take our Christian calling seriously and commit to live as believers, because only then can the Gospel touch a person’s heart and open it to receive the grace of love, to receive this great, all-welcoming mercy of God. Open your hearts to God the merciful Father who never tires of forgiving us. Faced with the challenges of everyday life, be shining examples of Christian hope, which is the certitude of the victory of love over hate and of peace over war.

*How might I be a better herald of mercy and hope
with those I meet today?*

HOPING FOR THINGS UNSEEN

“Look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” (2 Cor 4:18)

A journey always involves a transformation, a change. After a journey, we are no longer the same. There is always something new about those who have made a journey: they have learned new things, encountered new people and situations, and found inner strength amid the hardships and risks they met along the way. No one worships the Lord without first experiencing the interior growth that comes from embarking on a journey. We too must allow ourselves to learn from the journey of life, marked by the inevitable inconveniences of travel. We cannot let our weariness, our falls and our failings discourage us. Instead, by humbly acknowledging them, we should make them opportunities to progress towards the Lord Jesus. Life is not about showing off our abilities, but a journey towards the One who loves us. We are not to show off our virtues in every step of our life; rather, with humility we should journey towards the Lord. By keeping our gaze fixed on the Lord, we will find the strength needed to persevere with renewed joy and develop a way of “seeing” that transcends the visible and makes it possible for us to worship the Lord who is often hidden in everyday situations, in the poor and those on the fringes. A way of seeing things that is not impressed by sound and fury, but seeks in every situation the things that truly matter, and that seeks the Lord.

*How have I been most changed by
my drawing closer to God and Jesus?*

HOPE & JOY ARE FOUNDED ON GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

*"You who fear the Lord, hope for good things,
for lasting joy and mercy." (Sirach 2:9)*



Christian joy, like hope, is founded on God's faithfulness, on the certainty that God always keeps his promises. God has not abandoned his people, and has not left them to be vanquished by evil, because God is faithful, and God's grace is greater than sin. We must

learn this because we are stubborn and often fail to learn. However, which is greater, God or sin? God! And which is victorious to the end, God or sin? God! Is God able to defeat the most serious, most shameful, most terrible and worst of sins? With what weapon does God defeat sin? With love! This means that "God reigns." These words express our faith in a Lord whose power bends down to humanity to offer mercy and to free men and women from all that disfigures in them the beautiful image of God, for when we are in sin God's image is disfigured. The fulfillment of so much love will be the kingdom instituted by Jesus, that kingdom of forgiveness and peace which we celebrate at Christmas. We are called to become men and women of hope, cooperating in the coming of this kingdom. Each day may God give us and everyone that hope which arises when we see God in the crib in Bethlehem, for which we are preparing in this season of Advent. To see Jesus, to encounter Jesus: this is our joy!

*When have I experienced the most joy in my relationship with God?
With what results?*

HOPE HIDDEN IN EVERYDAY LIFE

*“LORD, be gracious to us; for you we long.
Be our strength every morning,
our salvation in time of trouble!” (Is 33:2)*

*H*ope is not something abstract but instead means living in expectation of the concrete encounter with Jesus. And wisdom consists in being able to rejoice in the little daily encounters of our life with Jesus. God is leading us on the journey toward our inheritance, secure in the knowledge that God is with us and that which we seek in our journey we will receive in the end. Hope carries us forward on the journey toward that inheritance. Living in hope is journeying towards a reward, yes, toward a happiness that we do not have now but we will have then. Hope is a difficult virtue to understand. It is a humble virtue, yet it never disappoints. It is also a concrete, everyday virtue that directs us towards our encounter with Jesus. And every time we encounter Jesus in the Eucharist, in prayer, in the Gospel, in the poor, in the life of the community, we take another step toward this definitive encounter at the end of our lives. So we rejoice in the little encounters of daily life preparing for that definitive encounter. Let us welcome Jesus and express our joy at accompanying him, at knowing him to be close, present in us and among us as a friend, a brother and also as a king. Jesus is God, but he lowered himself to walk with us as our friend and brother and illuminate our way (Jn 14:5-7).

*How might I find more time for encountering Jesus
by reading his words in the Gospels?*

KEEPING OUR EYES FIXED ON JESUS

“Let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith.” (Heb 12:1-2)



The author of the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that an important point of reference for our Christian lives is our hope. We must have the courage to go forward, persevering in running the race that lies before us, indicating what is the very core of hope: “keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus.” This is the point: if we don’t keep our eyes fixed on Jesus it is difficult for us to have hope. We can perhaps be optimistic, or positive, but hope, no. After all, hope is learned only by looking to Jesus, contemplating Jesus, which we learn through contemplative prayer, which can be done only with the Gospel in hand. Basically, you pick up the Gospel, select a passage, read it once, read it twice. Then imagine yourself in the scene, imagine what’s happening and speak with Jesus about what comes from your heart. And in this way, we allow hope to grow because we have our eyes fixed on Jesus. Contemplative prayer helps us to hope and teaches us to live from the substance of the Gospel by keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus as our example. From this comes hope. And also this way our Christian life moves between memory and hope: the memory of so many graces received from the Lord; and hope, looking to the Lord, who is the only One who can give us hope.

*What most challenges me to take my eyes off of Jesus
as my model and the goal of my life journey?*

JOYFUL SERVANTS OF HOPE

“I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom 8:38-39)

Our Christian hope, which is not mere optimism, nor a psychological attitude or desire to be courageous, is a gift that God gives us if we come out of ourselves and open our hearts to God. This hope does not disappoint us because the Holy Spirit has been poured into our hearts (Rom 5:5). The Holy Spirit does not make everything look appealing or remove evil with a magic wand. Rather he pours into us the vitality of life, which is not the absence of problems, but the certainty of being loved and always forgiven by Christ, who for us has conquered sin, conquered death and conquered fear. Thus nothing and no one will ever be able to separate us from God’s love. The Lord is alive and does not abandon us but is always working in history through his Holy Spirit. After having found him, each person is sent out by him to announce the gospel message, to awaken and resurrect hope in hearts burdened by sadness, in those who struggle to find meaning in life. As joyful servants of hope, we must proclaim the Gospel in a new way by our lives and by our love; otherwise we will be only an international organization full of followers and good rules, yet incapable of offering the hope for which the world longs. In this way Jesus comes to be born again in each of our lives and, through us, he continues to be the gift of salvation for others.

*How have I most experienced Jesus present with me
on my daily journey?*

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S KIND OF HOPE

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the holy Spirit.”
(Rom 15:13)



Our Christian hope is not a passing hope. Earthly hopes are fleeting and always have an expiration date. They are made with earthly ingredients which sooner or later spoil. The hope of the Holy Spirit has a long shelf life. It does not expire because it is based on God's fidelity.

By his perennial presence in the life of the pilgrim Church, the Holy Spirit illumines all believers with the light of hope. The Holy Spirit's hope is born deep in our heart and rekindles the certainty that we are precious because we are loved. It instills the trust that we are not alone. It is a hope that leaves peace and joy within, irrespective of what happens outside. It is a hope that has strong roots that none of life's storms can uproot and so "does not disappoint us" (Rom 5:5). This hope perseveres in the midst of trials because it is founded on faith and nurtured by charity, so it enables us to press forward in life. When we are suffering or wounded, we are led to build a wall around our sorrows and our fears. But the Spirit releases us from our walls and reveals to us the marvelous destiny for which we are born. The Spirit nurtures us with living hope. Let us invite him to come into us and be close to us. Come, Spirit Comforter! Come to give us some light, to give us the hope that does not disappoint. Come, Holy Spirit!

When and how have I most experienced the Holy Spirit's presence and guidance in myself and my life?

COME TO ME!

*“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places...
And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and
take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be.” (Jn 14:2-3)*



Faith’s service to the common good is always one of hope—a hope which looks ever ahead in the knowledge that only from God, from the future which comes from the risen Jesus, can our society find solid and lasting foundations. In this sense faith is linked to hope, for even if our dwelling place here below is wasting away, we have an eternal dwelling place which God has already prepared in Christ, in his risen body (2 Cor 4:16-5:5). The dynamic interrelation of faith, hope and charity (1 Thes 1:3; 1 Cor 13:13) thus leads us to embrace the concerns of all men and women on our journey towards our final encounter with God. In union with faith and charity, hope propels us towards a sure future, set against a different horizon with regard to the illusory enticements of the idols of this world yet granting new momentum and strength to our daily lives. Let us refuse to be robbed of hope, or to allow our hope to be dimmed by facile answers and solutions which block our progress, and instead in our time of waiting and longing, go forward towards the future trusting in the fulfillment of God’s promises and hoping to one day hear God say: “Come, come to me, brother; come, come to me, sister, for all eternity.”

*How has my hope for union with God most focused
and influenced my words and actions?*

A TIME TO CHOOSE

“No one can serve two masters; for a servant will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other” (Mt 6:24).

*H*ow many difficulties are present in the life of every individual, among our people, in our communities. Yet as great as these may seem, God never allows us to be overwhelmed by them. In those moments of discouragement we experience in life, in our efforts to evangelize or to embody our faith as parents within the family, always know in your heart that God is by your side and never abandons you! Let us never lose hope! Let us never allow it to die in our hearts! Evil is present in our history but it does not have the upper hand. The one with the upper hand is God, and God is our hope! It is true that nowadays, to some extent, everyone feels attracted by the many idols which take the place of God and appear to offer hope: money, success, power, pleasure. Often a growing sense of loneliness and emptiness in the hearts of many people leads them to seek satisfaction in these ephemeral idols. While honoring these idols leads to tangible albeit fleeting results, choosing God and his kingdom is a decision one takes in hope and which leaves its complete fulfillment to God. Christian hope looks to the future fulfillment of God’s promise and does not stop in the face of difficulty, because it is founded on God’s faithfulness, which never fails. God is always steadfast, a faithful father, a faithful friend and a faithful ally.

*When have I most experienced God’s presence
and help during the difficulties of my life?*

MARY, MODEL OF HOPE

“Love the LORD, all you who are faithful to him. The LORD protects the loyal, but repays the arrogant in full. Be strong and take heart, all who hope in the LORD.” (Ps 31:24-25)



Hope finds its supreme witness in Mary, the mother of God. In her we see that hope is not naive optimism but a gift of grace amid the realities of life. Hope is the virtue of those who, experiencing conflict—the struggle between life and death, good and evil in ourselves and in our lives—believe in the resurrection of Christ, in the victory of love. Mary’s Magnificat (Lk 1:46-55) is a song of hope, the song of the pilgrim People of God walking through history. It is the song of all who have faced the struggle of life while carrying in their heart the hope of the little and the humble. For us Christians, there must always be hope. Do not allow yourselves to be robbed of hope, because this hope is God’s gift which carries us forward with our eyes fixed on heaven. Mary’s song also contains the remembrance of her personal history of God with her. And this is true also for each of us and for every Christian have our own memory of God’s history with us, the memory of our encountering God who always takes the first step, who creates, saves and transforms us. We remember God’s word which warms our heart, and of God’s saving presence which gives life, purifies us, cares for and nourishes us. May Mary, who prepared for the coming of Christ with the totality of her existence, help us to follow her example and guide our steps to the coming Lord.

What most about Mary encourages me to hope more in God’s promises?

ANCHORED IN HOPE

“May we who have taken refuge in him be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us. We have this hope as an anchor of the soul, sure and firm.” (Heb 6:18-19)

On our journey towards Christ, may we never lose the hope we have been given but hold fast to that hope and find in God our refuge and our strength. The image of the anchor helps us to recognize the stability and security that is ours amid the troubled waters of this life, provided we entrust ourselves to the Lord Jesus. The storms that buffet us will never prevail, for we are firmly anchored in the hope born of grace, which enables us to live in Christ and to overcome sin, fear and death. This hope, which transcends life's fleeting pleasures and the achievement of our immediate goals, makes us rise above our trials and difficulties, and inspires us to keep pressing forward, never losing sight of the grandeur of the heavenly goal to which we have been called. Hope is God's gift that is placed deep within each human heart in order to shed light on this life. There is no corner of our heart that cannot be touched by God's love. We must make our own the hope of being born to a new life if we are to be faithful to the teaching of Jesus. Hope is the incentive to look to tomorrow and the power to press on towards the future and a changed life. Let us not resist when Christ comes to change our lives, but to be ready to let ourselves be visited by him, the awaited and welcome guest, even if it disturbs our plans.

*When and how has my hope in God most been
like an anchor for me in times of difficulty?*

HOPE COMES INTO THE WORLD WITH JESUS' BIRTH

“Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means “God is with us.” (Mt 1:23)



Our pilgrimage journey on the theme of hope, which is so very appropriate in the Season of Advent, leads us to reflect more specifically on the moment in which, so to speak, hope came into the world with the incarnation of the Son of God. In Jesus, God fulfills Isaiah’s promise of Immanuel, “God with us” by becoming genuinely human. Not abandoning his people, God draws near to the point of stripping himself of his divinity. In this way God shows his fidelity and inaugurates a new kingdom, which gives a new hope to mankind. And what is this hope? Eternal life in union with God. When we speak of hope, often it refers to what is not in our power to realize, which is invisible. In fact, what we hope for goes beyond our strength and our perception. But the birth of Christ speaks to us of a dependable, visible and understandable hope, because it is founded in God. Jesus comes into the world and gives us the strength to walk with him toward the fullness of life, to dwell in the present in a new way, albeit arduous. Thus for a Christian, to hope means the certainty of being on a journey with Christ toward the Father who awaits us. Hope is never still; hope is always journeying, and so making us journey. This hope, which the child of Bethlehem gives us, offers a destination, a sure, ongoing goal of full and definitive communion with God.

*How has my hope for union with God
most increased during this Advent season?*

CONTEMPLATING THE NATIVITY SCENE

*“For a child is born to us, a son is given to us;
upon his shoulder dominion rests.
They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero,
Father-Forever, Prince of Peace. His dominion is vast
and forever peaceful.” (Is 9:5-6)*

The Nativity scene conveys hope. Jesus, in whom the hope of God and the hope of humanity meet, is lovingly contemplated by Mary, the mother of hope. With her “yes” to the angel Gabriel she opened the door of our world to God, who chose her because her heart was full of hope and wholly enlivened by faith in God’s word. She looks on her newborn child and sees in him the love of God, who comes to save his people and the whole of humanity. Next to Mary is Joseph, a descendant of Jesse and of David, who also believed in the words of an angel, who looks on Jesus in the manger and rejoices that the child has come from the Holy Spirit and that God wanted him to be named “Jesus,” which means “God saves.” In that name there is hope for every man and woman, because through this child God will save mankind from death and from sin. By contemplating the Nativity scene, we prepare ourselves for the birth of the Lord. It will truly be a celebration if we welcome Jesus, the seed of hope that God sets down in the furrows of our individual and community history. Every “yes” to Jesus who comes, is a bud of hope. Let us trust in this bud of hope, in this “yes.” “Yes, Jesus, you can bring us to share in your relationship with the Father, and this is eternal life.” A happy and hopeful Christmas to all!

*How might I say “yes” to Jesus who wants to be born in me
and go with me on my journey to God?*

GOD WITH US IN A SURPRISING WAY

*“Remember not the events of the past,
the things of long ago consider not.
See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth,
do you not perceive it?” (Is 43:18-19)*



This is the message of Christmas: God’s Word became flesh. God is God with us, God who loves us, God walks with us. Thus, Christmas reveals God’s immense love for humanity. From this stems the enthusiasm, the hope of Christians, who in our poverty know that we are loved, visited and accompanied by God. So we look at the world and at history as the place in which to walk together with God and Jesus and with each other, toward the new heaven and the new earth. With the birth of Jesus a new promise is born, a new world is born, but also a world that can always be renewed. God is always present to raise up new persons to help purify the world from the sin that disorders and corrupts it. As much as human history and our own personal history can be marked by difficulties and weaknesses, faith in Jesus’ Incarnation tells us that God is linked fully with humanity and its history (Mt 28:20). This closeness of God to humanity, and to each of us, is a gift that never fades away! God is with us! Jesus is God with us! And where God is born, hope is born. Jesus brings hope. Jesus wants to establish with us a relationship which mirrors his own relationship with the Father: a relationship of reciprocal belonging in full trust, in intimate communion which is the eternal life towards which we are now resolutely journeying.

*How have myself and my world most changed
because of my new awareness of God’s presence?*

GOD HAS FREELY CHOSEN TO BE WITH US

“Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race. God will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them as their God.” (Rev 21:3)

The birth of Jesus is a feast of trust and of hope which overcomes uncertainty and pessimism. And the reason for our hope is this: God is with us and God still trusts us! God chooses earth as his dwelling place and come to abide with mankind and to be found in their lives. Therefore, earth is no longer only a valley of tears but rather the place where God himself has pitched his tent and the meeting place of God with us. God willed to share in our human condition to the point of becoming one with us in the person of Jesus, who is truly human and truly divine. Jesus is God-with-us always and forever with us in history’s suffering and sorrow. Jesus’ birth reveals that God “sided” with us once and for all, to save us, to raise us from the dust of our misery, from our difficulty, from our sins. Hence the great gift of the child of Bethlehem who brings us a spiritual energy, an energy which helps us not to despair in our struggle, in our hopelessness, in our sadness, for it is an energy that warms and transforms the heart. Indeed, the birth of Jesus brings us the good news that we are loved immensely and uniquely by God, and he not only enables us to know this love, he also gives it to us, he communicates it to us! This is our joy, this is the hope that we must bring to this world.

*How does the birth of Jesus most confirm God’s love
and my hope for union with God?*

THE MAGI'S PILGRIMAGE TO ENCOUNTER CHRIST

"Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage." (Mt 2:2)



Do we dare to dream, to hope and long for God, to expect the newness God brings, or do we let ourselves be swept along by life, like dry branches before the wind? The magi were not content with just getting by, with keeping afloat. They understood that to truly live, we need a lofty goal to spur our hope. Their journey was a journey of the spirit, a journey toward an encounter with Christ. They were attentive to visible signs that indicated God's presence. They were tireless in facing the trials of the search and courageous in deducing the implications for life that derive from an encounter with the Lord. The experience of the magi evokes the journey of every man and woman who are following their particular signs towards Christ. For the magi, and for us, to seek God means to journey while discerning in the visible sign of the star the invisible God who speaks to our hearts. God's Word is the light that guides our journey, nourishes our faith and continually renews our hearts and our communities. Therefore, let us not forget to read it and meditate upon it every day, so that it may become for each like a flame that we bear inside us to illuminate our steps, as well as those of others who journey beside us, who are perhaps struggling to find the path to Christ. May we see all things with the eyes of Jesus, that he may lead us on our path.

*How might I better use the Scriptures each day
to guide my journey to Christ?*

GIVING: THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS ALL YEAR LONG

“The gift you have received, give freely as a gift.” (Mt 10:8)

Having come to Jesus after a long journey, the magi do as he does for us: they bring gifts. Jesus has come to give his life for us; they offer him their own costly gifts of gold, incense and myrrh. The Gospel becomes real when the journey of life ends in giving. To give freely, for the Lord’s sake, without expecting anything in return is the sure sign that we have found Jesus. To do good without counting the cost, even when unasked, even when you gain nothing thereby, even if it is unpleasant, is what God wants. Jesus, who became small for our sake, asks us to offer something for the least of his brothers and sisters. Who are they? They are those who have nothing to give in return, the needy, the hungry, the stranger, the prisoner, the poor (Mt 25:31-46). We give a gift pleasing to Jesus when we care for a sick person, spend time with a difficult person, help someone for the sake of helping, or forgive someone who has hurt us. These are gifts freely given, and they cannot be lacking in the lives of Christians. Today let us look at our hands, so often empty of love, and let us try to think of some free gift that we can give without expecting anything in return. We have to begin by giving ourselves completely to God and by giving Jesus to others. That will please the Lord. And let us ask him: “Lord, let me rediscover the joy of giving.”

*What might I do today to give some gift of myself,
my time or my goods to better others’ lives?*

PILGRIMS OF HOPE

2025 JUBILEE YEAR PRAYER

Father in heaven,
may the faith you have given us
in your son, Jesus Christ, our brother,
and the flame of charity enkindled
in our hearts by the Holy Spirit,
reawaken in us the blessed hope
for the coming of your Kingdom.

May your grace transform us
into tireless cultivators
of the seeds of the Gospel.
May those seeds transform from within
both humanity and the whole cosmos
in the sure expectation of a
new heaven and a new earth, when,
with the powers of Evil vanquished,
your glory will shine eternally.

May the grace of the Jubilee
reawaken in us, Pilgrims of Hope,
a yearning for the treasures of heaven.

May that same grace spread
the joy and peace of our Redeemer
throughout the earth.

To you our God, eternally blessed,
be glory and praise for ever. *Amen.*

