

Mary, Triple Mother of Hope!

The November-December period we are currently experiencing is a great moment of hope. Hope, distinct from mere expectation, is one of the three theological virtues, expressing the confident trust that man places in God and His graces in this world, as well as in eternal life in the world to come. Hope in the resurrection leads us to pray for our departed ones during this month of November. The hope in the coming of the Lord is introduced by the Advent season and the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, helping us understand that this truth of faith is a divine gift and privilege granted to Mary in light of her divine motherhood. The third level of this hope stems from the beginning of the Jubilee Year, during which we are all called to be "Pilgrims of Hope," not only in Rome but also in our various places of life and pilgrimage (such as Lourdes). All these expressions of Hope find a common focal point in the person of Mary, the privileged one who lived hope and who gives the world the Risen One, with whom and following whom, we are all on a pilgrimage of Hope.

Mary, Mother of Hope in the Resurrection

The hope in the resurrection takes on meaning in the close connection the New Testament establishes between faith in the resurrection of Christ, already accomplished, and faith in the resurrection of the body and eternal life, inspired by the Holy Spirit within believers. By reciting the Creed, every Christian affirms his or her faith and hope in the resurrection. They do so with full confidence, being witnesses of Christ's resurrection and believers in the resurrection of Mary, assumed into heaven, body and soul. As sons and daughters of Mary, comforted by faith, we hold this hope in the resurrection and therefore pray for our deceased loved ones, invoking the intercession of she who is "Gate of Heaven" and "Queen of the World," that she may welcome our brothers and sisters into the Kingdom of her Divine Son.

To Hope Better, One Must Hope!

To more fully live the hope of the resurrection, one must first live the hope of grace, which is what Alphonsus Liguori describes as "the desire to possess God." To live hope on earth as Mary did is to place one's trust not in humans nor in one's own merits but solely in divine grace and the aid of heaven, thus advancing in the love of God. Every stage of her life manifests this virtue, which enables Mary to say, even before Paul, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13). To hope in order to hope, then, is to live fully one's faith and trust in God on earth. This allows us to deepen our loving and intimate relationship with God, thus enabling us to face the great trial. In short, we must live with God (in grace) to hope to be with Him eternally.

Behold, the Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son. (Is 7:14)

The time of waiting for the birth of the Lord is, by excellence, the Marian time of hope. During Advent, the Christian is called to live hope in four stages: *Levavi* (1st Sunday), *Populus Sion* (2nd Sunday), *Gaudete* (3rd Sunday), and *Rorate* (4th Sunday). During this period, together with Our Lady of Hope, the faithful prepare the ways of Him who, in the fullness of time, is to be born of a Woman (cf. Gal 4:4), of a Virgin (cf. Is 7:14). The hope in the fulfillment of the divine promise held by Mary ("Let it be done to me according to your word") leads Mary to trust in God and to assume the responsibilities inherent to motherhood: giving life, protecting it, giving a name, nourishing, accompanying, and above all, treasuring

everything in her heart. The hope of all grace and the trust in God that flows from it must inspire Mary's Sons and Daughters to also take on commitments and responsibilities in fulfilling God's plan for them.

Cum Maria, Spes non confundit...

The pilgrimage of hope to which we are invited starting from next December 24 and throughout the year 2025, cannot be undertaken without Mary and respects the four stages of every journey with God, thus uniting daily hope (material and spiritual graces) with eternal hope. It begins from the sorrow of the world, as the Pope points out: "We often encounter discouraged people who look to the future with skepticism and pessimism, as if nothing could bring them happiness" (SnC, 1). This is the starting point for every person who, when they experience an encounter with God, thanks to "a firm assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen" (Heb 11:1), finds themselves on "a path that requires strong moments to nourish and strengthen hope, an irreplaceable companion that reveals the goal: the encounter with the Lord Jesus" (SnC, 5). Ultimately, this intimacy with God grows our faith and also all the virtues that enable us to deepen our relationship with God, making us "a leaven of authentic hope, an announcement of new heavens and a new earth (cf. 2 Pt 3:13) where we will dwell in justice and concord among peoples, striving towards the fulfillment of the Lord's promise" (SnC n. 25).

For us, members of the Family of Our Lady of Lourdes, this pilgrimage cannot take place without Mary and Bernadette. Both are models of hope for us. Mary's life is guided by hope, from her "let it be done to me according to your word" to her discreet but concrete presence with the apostles on the day of Pentecost. She never ceased to hope and to nourish this hope. Moreover, Mary also enables others to hope. This is the case of Elizabeth, the spouses at Cana, and even the apostles, with whom she journeys through life until the end. And it is this same hope that she transmits to Bernadette Soubirous by visiting her and promising her eternal happiness. Bernadette, in turn, lives from hope. A hope that we can categorize into four stages of her life: before the apparitions, during the apparitions, after the apparitions, and during her consecrated life in Nevers. All these stages have a common thread: hope. Bernadette places her complete trust in Christ, who is her only treasure, and, from the grotto, which is already her paradise, to Nevers, the place of fulfillment, she has eyes only for God. This hope gives her particular strength, enabling her to rise above poverty, illness, prejudice, judgments, mockery, and the trials of consecrated life, etc. However, like Mary, she shares her hope, in truth and charity, with sincere love for God and for others, especially the sick. Finally, through hope, she enters, like Mary, into that eternal joy.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, let us live fully this triple hope in this special moment, and let us invoke Mary and Bernadette, models of hope for us. May we pray well for the departed, enter into the season of Advent with grace, and prepare joyfully for the Jubilee Year of Hope.

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