

## Meditation week 1 - March 10 to 16, 2019

### Small communities of faith

#### Second Sunday of Lent

*“In the hope of eternal life that God, who never lies, promised before the ages began.” (Titus 1, 2)*

This year in our parish, our theme for the liturgical year is: “Welcome home Un lieu d’espérance.” Our community, our parish, our church is a place of hope. A place where we feel good, where we can fraternize with people who are like us because we all belong to Jesus Christ.

But what is hope? We cannot understand hope by itself. The three theological (relating to God) virtues are interrelated. When we have faith, we believe, we know that God exists. With charity, we act and with hope, we dream. We all have dreams, of a better life, to find love, to have a career, children, a beautiful home, to be rich, to name a few. These are all worthwhile, but human desires. The virtue of hope lies at another level. We Christians dream of eternal salvation, of meeting God face to face at the end of our earthly life.

Pope Francis in a homily thus speaks of hope: “the humblest of the three virtues, because it is hidden in life. [...] Hope is a risky virtue, a virtue, as Saint Paul says, of an ardent expectation of the revelation of the Son of God. It is not an illusion. The catechism states that ‘hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness’. And continues by saying: ‘By hope we desire, and with steadfast trust await from God, eternal life and the graces to merit it.’”

Hope is that little flame that flickers in our heart and makes us dream and believe in a better world, in salvation accessible to all. It is this flame that Abraham had in him, because he believed in a God of mercy, a God of the impossible who gave him a son in his old age. Abraham is a man of faith, a man of hope. *“Hoping against hope”* (Rom 4:18), he believed; thus he became *the father of many nations*, according to the Lord’s promise! Yes, Abraham had moments where he was discouraged, where he doubted that God would make good on his promise, but still he continued to hope.

*“Abram put his faith in the Lord, who attributed it to him as an act of righteousness.” Gn 15, 6*

Pope Francis tells us about this pivotal moment in human history in these terms.

“By trusting in God’s promise, Abraham agrees to leave his land, to make the journey and to become a stranger in a foreign land, all the while hoping in that “impossible” son that God would give him, even though Sarah’s breast was now barren. Abraham believes, his faith opens up to a seemingly unreasonable hope. Hope is this ability to trust beyond all human reasoning, wisdom and cautiousness prevalent in the world, beyond what is normally considered common sense, in short to believe in the impossible. Hope opens new horizons, makes us able to dream what is not even imaginable. With hope we are able to walk in the light even in the darkness of an uncertain future. The virtue of hope is beautiful; it gives us so much strength to walk in life.<sup>1</sup>”

God brought him outside and said: *“Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” Gn 15, 5*

By this sign, Abraham sees with the eyes of faith God’s faithfulness’ towards him. Whenever he looks at the stars in the sky, he will remember the covenant that God made with him.

#### **Spiritual exercise**

What actions can I take during Lent so that my church, my community, my family becomes a place of hope, a place where it is good to gather, to be together?

Take time to contemplate the stars and remember how much God is present in your life.

---

<sup>1</sup> François I, Audience générale (28 décembre 2016), [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/fr/audiences/2016/documents/papa-francesco\\_20161228\\_udienza-generale.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/fr/audiences/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20161228_udienza-generale.html)  
Unfortunately, this text was not translated into English. This reference is for the French version.

## Meditation week 2 March 17<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> 2019

### Small communities of faith

#### Third Sunday of Lent

*“Hope in God! I will praise him still, my Saviour, my God.” Psalm 43, 5*

Thus sings the psalmist, *I hope in God, my Savior and my God*. God never ceases to lose hope in us, he keeps on pursuing us with his love. In the parable of the fig tree we see how much the winegrower relentlessly wants the tree to bear fruit. What fruits does God expect from us?

Let's see how nature produces fruits, for example an apple. Planting apple pips can give apple trees, but we do not know what apples we will get. To obtain a McIntosh apple, we proceed by grafting. A slip of a budding McIntosh branch is grafted onto a hardy, vigorous, disease-resistant apple tree, the rootstock. Maybe the graft will take, the opposite is also true, because God gave us free will. It all depends on us. This is how the Lord wants to proceed in our life, he wants to enter into a relationship with us, to unite with us so that we, in turn, will produce “good” fruits of charity, kindness, generosity, mercy, and this, with the grace of the Holy Spirit. If we reject God, the transplant will not take. It is also possible that the original apple tree, in this case us, produces shoots hindering the growth of “good” fruits. God also proceeds in our life in this way, removing all obstacles hindering our union with Him. The cuts are often painful. We resist and prefer to fend for ourselves, to be self-sufficient and keep our bad inclinations.<sup>1</sup>

We often live isolated from each other, the spirit of community is often absent even within the same family. We seem to have lost hope. It is so important to cultivate hope in our lives as Pope Francis reminds us:

“It is hope that supports life, that protects it, safeguards it and makes it grow. If men and women had not nurtured hope, if they had not held on to this virtue, they would never have come out of the caves and they would have left no trace on the history of the world. It is the most divine thing that can exist in the heart of mankind.

A French poet — Charles Péguy — has left us beautiful pages on hope (cf. *The Portico of the Mystery of the Second Virtue*). He says in a poetic way, that God is not amazed so much by the faith of human beings and not even by their charity — but what really fills him with wonder and moves him — is the hope of the people: “That those poor children”, he writes, “see how things are going and believe that they will be better tomorrow morning”. The poet's image recalls the faces of many people who have transited through this world — farmers, poor labourers, migrants in search of a better future — who have struggled tenaciously despite the bitterness of a difficult present, filled with many trials, enlivened however, by the trust that their children would have a more just and serene life. They fought for their children; they fought in hope. (...)

At times, having had everything life offers is a misfortune. Think about a young man who was never taught the virtues of expectation and patience, who did not have to sweat over anything, who had burned his bridges and at 20 “already knows how the world turns”. He is destined to receive the worst punishment: that of not wanting anything anymore. This is the worst punishment. Closing the door to desires, to dreams. He seems like a young man, yet autumn has already descended on his heart.<sup>2</sup>”

When we have lost hope, the fig tree dries out and we no longer carry “good” fruits or so little.

#### **Spiritual exercise :**

May God awaken in us hope, the desire to excel so that his Kingdom may come on earth. Let us be his “agents of hope”. Am I one to my relatives, my friends? Or am I like the dried fig tree?

During Lent, I take note of my addictions, of what I like least about myself. What would I like to change in myself so that I may produce more “good” fruits?

---

<sup>1</sup> Summary of a talk given by Father Jacques at the Cistercian Abbey of Rougemont, May 2012

<sup>2</sup> Francis I, General Audience (27 September 2017),  
[https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2017/documents/papa-francesco\\_20170927\\_udienza-generale.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170927_udienza-generale.html)

## Meditation Week 3 – March 24<sup>th</sup> au 30<sup>th</sup> 2019

### Small communities of faith

#### Fourth Sunday of Lent – Year C

*“Blessed be the God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.” 1 Peter 1, 3-4*

This Sunday’s gospel narrates the parable known as the Prodigal Son. Pope Francis in a wonderful audience focusses rather on the parable of the *Merciful Father*, a Father who never lost hope to find his lost son one day, or us as it may be, when for all kinds of reasons we tend to distance ourselves from the Lord. Every day God waits for us, He is *our hope*.

We will reflect today on the Parable of the Merciful Father. It tells of a father and his two sons, and it helps us understand the infinite mercy of God.

We shall begin at the end, that is, the joy in the heart of the father, who says: “let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found” (Lk 15:23-24). With these words the father interrupted the younger son just when he was confessing his guilt: “I am no longer worthy to be called your son...” (v. 19). But this expression is unbearable to the heart of the father, who is quick to restore the signs of dignity to the son: the best robe, the fatted calf, shoes. Jesus does not describe a father who is offended and resentful, a father who would, for example, say to his son: “you will pay for this”. On the contrary, the father embraces him, awaits him with love. The only thing that the father has on his mind is that his son stands before him healthy and safe and this makes him happy and he celebrates. The reception of the prodigal son is described in a moving way: “while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him” (v. 20).

What tenderness! He sees him at a distance: what does this mean? That the father had constantly gone to the balcony to look at the road to see if his son would return; that son who had misbehaved in many ways found the father there waiting for him. How beautiful is the father’s tenderness! The father’s mercy is overflowing, unconditional, and shows itself even before the son speaks. Certainly, the son knows he erred and acknowledges it: “I have sinned ... treat me as one of your hired servants” (vv. 18-19). These words crumble before the father’s forgiveness. The embrace and the kiss of his father makes him understand that he was always considered a son, in spite of everything. This teaching of Jesus is very important: our condition as children of God is the fruit of the love of the Father’s heart; it does not depend on our merits or on our actions, and thus no one can take it away, not even the devil! No one can take this dignity away.

Jesus’ words encourage us never to despair. I think of the worried moms and dads watching their children move away, taking dangerous paths. I think of the parish priests and catechists who wonder at times if their work is in vain. But I also think of the person in prison, who feels his life is over. I think of those who have made mistakes and cannot manage to envision the future, of those who hunger for mercy and forgiveness and believe they don’t deserve it.... In any situation of life, I must not forget that I will never cease to be a child of God, to be a son of the Father who loves me and awaits my return. Even in the worst situation of life, God waits for me, God wants to embrace me, God expects me. (...)

This Gospel passage teaches us that we all need to enter the House of the Father and to share in his joy, in his feast of mercy and of brotherhood. Brothers and sisters, let us open our hearts, in order to be “merciful like the Father”!<sup>1</sup>

### Spiritual Exercise

Am I this merciful father? Am I able to forgive? Am I able to forgive myself? To forgive the people that have hurt me? It is sometimes difficult to start such a process. Ask the Lord to help you.

---

<sup>1</sup> François 1, General Audience (May 11<sup>th</sup> 2016)  
[https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/fr/audiences/2016/documents/papa-francesco\\_20160511\\_udienza-generale.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/fr/audiences/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160511_udienza-generale.html)  
You can read this audience, which also tells of the 2 sons, in its entirety, on the Vatican website.

## Meditation week 4 – March 31<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> April 2019

### Small communities of faith

#### 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent

*“And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ [Jesus], will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you.” 1 Peter 5, 10*

This is our hope that at the end of our days, despite all that we endure here on earth, we are called to God’s eternal glory. St. Paul reminds us of it: *“I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God’s upward calling, in Christ Jesus.” Ph 3, 14*

How to stay firm, how to be steadfast in our faith, in this world where everything incites us to think only of ourselves, of our own pleasure and to worry little about our neighbour? Simply by putting our trust in God, and letting him guide us. It is He who must “take the steering wheel” of our life. Then we can say with humility, *yes Lord that it be done to me according to your word<sup>1</sup>*, following the example of Mary. All our being must be given up to God, not partially, but all of ourselves, our thoughts and actions, every day. How? By simply living our daily life according to his Will, doing our best.

Pope Francis reminds us that our hope in eternal life is like *an anchor* in our life.

‘The first Christians represented her as an anchor. Hope was an anchor; an anchor fixed on the bank of the beyond. Our life is like walking on the rope to this anchor. ‘But what are we anchored to?’ Asked the Bishop of Rome. ‘Are we anchored precisely here, on the shore of this ocean so far, or are we anchored in an artificial lagoon that we created, with our rules, our behaviour, our schedules, our clericalisms, our ecclesiastical attitudes – not ecclesial, huh? – . Are we anchored where everything is comfortable and safe? This is not hope. Hope “is a grace to ask”. The Pope said that “to live in hope is one thing, because in hope we are saved, and to live as a good Christian without more is another thing; live in expectation of revelation, or live with the commandments”; be anchored to the shore of the future world “or parked in the artificial lagoon”.<sup>2</sup>

*“Do you not know that the runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run so as to win. Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one.” (1 Co 9, 24-25)*

We are all engaged in a long *race* to win the ultimate prize, eternal life. The path will sometimes be arduous, sometimes tinged with joy, at other times with pain and suffering, but the essential thing is to start walking, our gaze fixed on Jesus.

### Spiritual Exercise

What is my anchor? To whom am I anchored? To what am I anchored? Revisit at this time of Lent what my priorities are. Is God at the top of the list? Or does my job, my friends, my concerns, etc., prevent me from getting closer to God?

---

<sup>1</sup> Lk 1, 38

<sup>2</sup> François 1, Méditation matinale, October 29<sup>th</sup> 2013, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/fr/cotidie/2013/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie\\_20131029.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/fr/cotidie/2013/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20131029.html)  
Unfortunately, this text was not translated into English. This reference is for the French version.

**Meditation Week 5 – April 6<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> 2019**  
**Small Faith Communities**  
**Palm Sunday**

*“You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” 1 Peter 5, 5*

We are entering Holy Week, the week of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the first two readings, Jesus Christ exhorts us to follow him, to become a servant like Him. During Lent, you have certainly accomplished acts of charity, helped your neighbours, your friends, your family. What the Lord is asking us to do is to do more than to *be helpful*. He asks us to be *“dressed for action”*.

What does it mean to be dressed for action? This implies an opening of the heart and availability to serve with no ulterior motive, almost without thinking, simply out of love. For example, a priest who wears the Roman collar, a police officer in uniform are dressed for action. By their clothes they are saying we are ready to serve. A mother, a father are always dressed for action concerning their children. Parents do not count the hours, the sacrifices that it requires of them to ensure the safety and well-being of their children.

In the texts that follow, Pope Francis explains what it means to be a servant dressed for action.

Announcing that he must suffer, be put to death in order to then rise, Jesus wants his followers to understand that he is a humble Messiah, a servant. He is the Servant obedient to the word and the will of the Father, until the complete sacrifice of his own life. For this reason, turning toward the whole crowd there, He declares that one who wishes to become his disciple must accept being a servant, as He has made himself a servant, and cautions: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mk 8, 34).

To undertake the discipleship of Jesus means to take up your cross – we all have one – to accompany him on his path, an uncomfortable path that is not of success or of fleeting glory, but one which takes us to true freedom, to that which frees us from selfishness and sin. It is necessary to clearly reject that worldly mentality which places one’s “I” and one’s own interests at the center of existence. That is not what Jesus wants from us! Instead Jesus invites us to lose our life for him and for the Gospel, to receive it renewed, fulfilled and authentic. We are certain, thanks to Jesus, that this path leads us to the resurrection, to the full and definitive life with God. Choosing to follow him, our Master and Lord who made himself the Servant of all, one to walk behind and to listen attentively to his Word – remember to read a passage from the Gospel every day – and in the Sacraments<sup>1</sup>.

Christians are called to be men and women of hope, united by the certainty of a God who never gives up. [...] “It is I who have come to serve you, dressed for action, to serve you at the table, to be of service.” Jesus is the one who “came to serve, not to be served.” Ephesians (2, 12-22) For “the service of God is free: we are sons, not slaves. And to serve God in peace, with serenity, when He himself has removed the obstacles that take away peace and serenity, means serving him freely.” It is no coincidence that “when we serve the Lord freely, we feel an even deeper peace.” It is like hearing again the voice of the Lord who says, “Come, come, come, good and faithful servant! .” That is why we must only “ask and make space,” so that God “transforms us into free servants, into sons, not into slaves<sup>2</sup>.”

### **Spiritual Exercise**

God speaks to us through the events we encounter and the people that surround us. It is through them that we hear the voice of God. Do I hear it? How can I be more available to the people around me?

---

<sup>1</sup> Francis 1, Angelus September 13 2015  
[https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2015/documents/papa-francesco\\_angelus\\_20150913.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2015/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20150913.html)

<sup>2</sup> Francis 1, Morning Meditation, Sainte-Marthe, November 8<sup>th</sup> 2016  
[https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/fr/cotidie/2016/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie\\_20161108\\_serviteurs-libres.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/fr/cotidie/2016/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20161108_serviteurs-libres.html)  
This text is only in French, it was not translated into English.

## Meditation Week 6 – April 22<sup>nd</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> 2019

### Small Faith Communities

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” 1 Peter 1, 3-4*

Christ is risen hallelujah! Yes, he **really** is risen! We, who have been brought up knowing that Jesus Christ is truly risen, cannot understand the significance this event had on the people of his day. Already, for us, to consider that a man of flesh and blood died and resurrected is a difficult concept to grasp. One can only understand and believe with the eyes of faith, and the trust we place in those who have taught us the truths of our creed.

Pope Francis in his exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium The Joy of the Gospel* – which we meditated during Advent of 2018 – explains the impact the resurrection of Jesus Christ had. From the darkness in which we were immersed, we came to the light. *“For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light – for the fruit of the light is seen in all that is good and right and true. Try to find what is pleasing to the Lord.” Ep 5, 8-10*

275. In the second chapter, we reflected on that lack of deep spirituality which turns into pessimism, fatalism, and mistrust. Some people do not commit themselves to mission because they think that nothing will change and that it is useless to make the effort. They think: “Why should I deny myself my comforts and pleasures if I won’t see any significant result?” This attitude makes it impossible to be a missionary. It is only a malicious excuse for remaining caught up in comfort, laziness, vague dissatisfaction and empty selfishness. It is a self-destructive attitude, for “man cannot live without hope: life would become meaningless and unbearable”. If we think that things are not going to change, we need to recall that Jesus Christ has triumphed over sin and death and is now almighty. Jesus Christ truly lives. Put another way, “if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain” (1 Cor 15:14). The Gospel tells us that when the first disciples went forth to preach, “the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message” (Mk 16:20). The same thing happens today. We are invited to discover this, to experience it. Christ, risen and glorified, is the wellspring of our hope, and he will not deprive us of the help we need to carry out the mission which he has entrusted to us.

276. Christ’s resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force. Often it seems that God does not exist: all around us we see persistent injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty. But it is also true that in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life and sooner or later produces fruit. On razed land life breaks through, stubbornly yet invincibly. However dark things are, goodness always re-emerges and spreads. Each day in our world beauty is born anew, it rises transformed through the storms of history. Values always tend to reappear under new guises, and human beings have arisen time after time from situations that seemed doomed. Such is the power of the resurrection, and all who evangelize are instruments of that power.<sup>1</sup>

### Spiritual Exercise

Simply be joyful. You have gone through Lent, made efforts to improve yourself, made sacrifices, were helpful, got closer to God. Now it's time to celebrate. Easter season lasts 50 days until Pentecost. Keep in your heart the paschal joy, it can give you wings.

---

<sup>1</sup> Francis I, Exhort. Apost. *Evangelii gaudium* (November 24<sup>th</sup> 2013), chapter 5 Spirit-filled Evangelizers, The mysterious working of the risen Christ and his Spirit, n° 275- 276  
[https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html)