

33 The Ascension of Our Lord

“And the Lord Jesus was taken up into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God.” (Mt. 16: 19)

Today is not only a day of glory for Jesus, it is also a day of victory for us! For him, **the Ascension completes the glory of his resurrection**. For us, if we suffer and die with him and rise again with him, **we too shall share in the glory** of his resurrection.

Yes, Jesus has drained the bitter chalice of his passion to the last drop! God’s justice is well satisfied! Therefore, **heaven opens again!** Thus, Our Lord accomplished the task given to him. (He says: “I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do” - Jn. 17: 4).

Jesus has formed his Apostles and founded his Church – so that his work may be continued. “To them he showed himself alive by many proofs, for forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God.” (Acts 1:3) **He clothed them with divine authority and has put all the means of grace at their disposal**; and charged them to “go and teach all nations” (Mt. 28: 19) and to **“be witness unto him** in Jerusalem, and in all Samaria, and even **to the utter most part of the earth** (India)” (Acts 1: 8).

And then rising slowly in the radiant glory of his Godhead, amidst songs of Joy and sounds of trumpets, **surrounded by the souls whom he had freed from limbo – and those who shared his triumph, “lifting up his hands, he blessed them and departed from them, and was carried to heaven.”** (Lk. 24: 50, 51) Full of this great event, the disciples together with the Blessed Virgin Mary, “adoring went back into Jerusalem with great joy!” (Lk. 24: 53).

Yes, the triumph of the Cross has begun and shall continue forever! Suffering, abandonment, agony and anguish – was his – **at the foot of this very mount of olives – the garden of Gethsemane**. He was lying there in his agony as a worm trampled underfoot – a prey of cruel torments. It was here that he was betrayed by a false friend, taken prisoner by his own people, that he might be condemned to die the cruelest of deaths!

On the top of the same mount of olives Jesus now assembles his disciples (who had forsaken him and fled) **to see his triumph and to hear his last words and to receive his blessings**. Here where his passion began, he gave the Apostles the order to continue his mission to the whole world!

They witnessed his glorious entry into the kingdom of God – entry which would one day be theirs, when they would be dragged before kings and judges for his name’s sake.

The Father, who had not let the chalice pass from his only begotten Son (Mt. 26: 39), crowns him today as king of heaven and earth – because of the suffering death he underwent. St. Paul says: “We see Jesus **crowned with glory and honour - for suffering and death**” (Heb. 2: 9). What an example for us who with **our fear of suffering and death** are inclined to take the road of least resistance!

Let us today promise fidelity to Jesus Christ and perseverance till death in prayer and loyalty in his service despite no satisfaction – as a striking proof of our faithfulness to Christ – “Christi Fideles”! Let us increase our hope in the infinite merits of his passion and look forward with hope to the eternal happiness he has promised us.

Practice of the Virtue of Hope

Hope is the second of the three **theological virtues**; the other two are **faith** and **charity** (or divine love). Because the theological virtue of hope has as its object union with God in the afterlife, we say that it is a supernatural virtue, which, unlike the **cardinal virtues**, (prudence, temperance, fortitude, justice) clearly cannot be practiced by those who do not believe in God.

What Is Hope?

The theological virtue of **hope** is a supernatural gift bestowed by God through which one trusts that God will grant eternal life and the means of obtaining it providing one cooperates.

Hope: Our Baptismal Gift

“Hope” received in baptism as a gift makes a person desire eternal life, which is the heavenly vision of God, and gives one the confidence of receiving the grace necessary to reach heaven.” St. Thomas Aquinas describes hope, as a longing for a good we desire that is not yet (fully) possessed but possibly could be. “**Friendship with God**” turns out to be hope’s end and hope’s means to that end. **With practice**, hope unfolds and is perfected by love.

How can we practice hoping in God?

The theological virtue of hope reframes and reorganizes our desires for good things. Given hope's orientation to God as the end toward which all other goods are directed, we should expect hope to saturate our imagination and motivation in ways that shape our **daily practices**. There are three ways in kind: **Hope in Reliance, Hope in Suffering, Hope in waiting**.

Hope in Reliance: Reliance on God's almighty power and infinite mercy and promises is most important in practicing hope. St. Thomas Aquinas says:

Theological hope is proper to the will as the **virtue** or good habit which enables one to rely on God to reach ultimate beatitude. That is why we pray in the act of hope: "O my God, **relying on thine almighty power** and infinite mercy and promises, I hope to obtain pardon of my sins, the help of thy grace, and life everlasting through the merits of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Redeemer. Amen."

Let us **rely on the providence of God to get a valid bishop to pass on the priesthood of Christ in this conclave of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel**, when it looks as if our hope is put in test. Our unflinching hope will be answered by divine providence through the miraculous intervention of Our Lady, if we fulfil the requests of Our Lady of Fatima.

Hope in Suffering: Paul and Silas singing in chains (Acts 16: 25), is a good example for the **endurance of suffering as a practice of hope**. **Suffering keeps us painfully aware of our hunger for goodness and love** that the world cannot deliver. The detachment and relinquishment which suffering demands, **erode all pretense** that this world is our home and that the good we have now can satisfy. Like nothing else, it shatters our fantasies and idols and exposes the true foundation of our lives. Reflecting on the link between faith and hope (in Hebrews 11:1 - "Now faith is the substance of things to be hoped for"), we must endure suffering as a practice of hope.

Hope in waiting: Theological hope's ground of possibility is **not** in ourselves but in God. Hope in God requires willing dependence and trust in his power. The prison context makes this clear. We who are merely waiting in this world of prison, are not waiting for anyone or anything. **Those who hopefully await God's help expect good things and live in readiness to receive them from him**. "**Waiting for the Lord**" is the spiritual work of practicing hope.

Yes, Our Lady of Mount Carmel wants us to practice this virtue of divine hope by patiently waiting for the Lord's will to obtain a bishop!

St. Maximilian Kolbe and the Theological Virtue of Hope

The story is well known. In his labors to protect many Jewish refugees when the Nazis invaded Poland in 1939, Maximilian Kolbe was arrested, and sent off to Auschwitz in 1941. There, amid the death camp, he worked to encourage his fellow prisoners by setting an example to practice the virtue of hope.

One day a prisoner escaped, and the guards decided to punish 10 inmates of the cellblock by condemning them to death by starvation in an underground bunker. One of the ten was one Dr. Franciszek Gajowniczek, who began to weep and cried out, "My poor wife and children! I will never see them again!" At that moment, Fr. Kolbe calmly and purposefully stepped forward.

"I wish to die for that man. I am old; he has a wife and children," he said. And the commandant agreed to grant the request.

Thrown into the crowded underground bunker with the other men, Maximilian Kolbe continued to set an example of hope, leading them in prayers of praise and adoration to God, singing hymns, and encouraging them one by one to focus on the certain and irrevocable promises of Christ for life eternal, and to die peacefully. Weeks later it became necessary to kill him by lethal injection.

Maximilian Kolbe, a martyr for divine charity, practicing divine hope, was canonized on 10 October 1982, with the surviving Dr. Franciszek Gajowniczek being present in the ceremonies of Canonization.

Our Life of Hope

We can learn from the life of St. Maximilian Kolbe, that the one which stands out above others is the **power of hope**. It was the virtue of hope that allowed him to continue to trustingly walk forward, even when faced with death itself, confident in the promises of Christ, enabling him to live as a child of God.

Further, the example of St. Maximilian's life teaches us not to fall prey to the temptation of thinking life's tragedies are somehow entirely random coincidences, outside of Divine Providence, which cannot possibly in any way be linked to our destiny of eternal happiness in God. Even the very worst of circumstances, such as the Corona attack, can ultimately be the very path toward permanent, supernaturally infused bliss and the unending reception of divine love, provided we **open our hearts in hope** to God and make every effort to live according to his will.