

HOPE AND CARE FOR THE PRESENT

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I have been invited to offer you a “reading” of the Rector Major’s *Strenna* 2021: «Moved by hope: “See, I am making all things new” (*Rev* 21:5) ». I would like to stress that I have no intention of repeating it, let alone “commenting on the commentary”. Incidentally, I am sure you have already read it, and probably even studied it in depth. I will only take my cue from what it says – and from Pope Francis’ Message to the participants in the XXVIII General Chapter, which seems to be “the foundational text” — to make a few remarks.¹

1. Accepting, living, passing through these difficult times

Without making too technical an analysis or an exhaustive study, we can recognise with the Rector Major that the present times are *difficult* or, according to the adverb he uses, *very difficult*. The Pope expresses himself in a similar way in his Message to the Salesians, in which he invites them to accept that they are immersed in a time in history that is *changing, uncertain, inconsistent, fast-moving, unpredictable and destabilising*. “No one can say with certainty and precision (if ever one could) what will happen in the near future on a social, economic, educational and cultural level.”² If we recall, these words were spoken at the outset of the COVID-19 event, so we can imagine how the disease, with all its disruptiveness, reinforced Francis’ diagnosis. Indeed, the *epidemic* or, with etymological propriety, the *pandemic*, was neither the first nor the deadliest in human history. Yet, it has brazenly reminded us of our mortality – a poignant *memento mori* –³ and, most of all, it has furiously shaken our unsustainable lifestyles.⁴ Without devaluing it, however, we must recognise that with its exceptionality it emerged in a context that (before it, and certainly at its end) was and will continue to be *complicated*.

These *tiring* times, which, according to the well-known description of Zygmunt Bauman, the Pope also describes as *fluid*,⁵ are described by Tomáš Halík as «*complex and multi-faceted*».⁶ And in these times, he continues, those who accompany and care for people in particular, if they do not want to be *naïve* or *cynical*, must be people of *hope*.

¹ Cf. FRANCIS, *Message to the Members of GC28* (March 4th, 2020), in «AGC» CII/433 (2020), 55-65. Speaking of hope, the reference to *Rev* 21:5 – the title of the *Strenna* – is found on page 57.

² FRANCIS, *Message to the Members of GC28*, 55.

³ Cf. Carlos María GALLI, *La vida, la muerte y la esperanza en la primera pandemia global*, in «Vida Nueva» 3177 (2020), 20-21.

⁴ Cf. Iván FRESIA, *Las cosas van a cambiar y, quizá, para siempre*, in SOCIEDAD ARGENTINA DE TEOLOGÍA (a cura di), *COVID-19*, Buenos Aires: SAT 2020, 51-61.

⁵ According to Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1925-2017), accelerated and permanent change defines the fluid and volatile state of today’s “liquid” society. Cf. *Modernità liquida*, Roma: Laterza, 2002.

⁶ Tomáš HALÍK, *La notte del confessore. La fede cristiana in un tempo di incertezza*, Milano: Paoline 2013, 10. The author is a Czech Catholic priest and theologian (1948) qualified in philosophy, sociology and psychology. He survived the persecution of the communist regime and now teaches at Charles University in Prague. For his books, translated into several languages, and for his commitment to inter-religious dialogue, human rights and religious freedom, he has been awarded several prizes, including the *Cardinal König Prize* in 2003, the *Romano Guardini Prize* in 2010 and the *Templeton Prize* in 2014.

Who is cynical? The *pessimist*, the one who is convinced that it is not worth betting on men because «they do not change» (Ps 55:20) and, therefore, does not believe in them or their motives, doubts the sincerity and goodness of others, and shows indifference to other people. He tries to protect himself, has no decency and lives arrogantly.

Who is naïve? The *optimist* typical of modernism. Says Halík:

As I understand it, optimism is the belief that “everything is ok”; it is a naïve tendency to believe that *something* will make things better and better, and that if, at the moment, we are not living “in the best of all possible worlds”, we will soon reach that *optimum*. That redeeming *something* on which optimism relies may be scientific and technological progress, the power of the human intellect, revolution, social engineering, the various patterns imagined by the “engineers of the human soul”, or pedagogical and social experiments in social reform. This is the secular version of optimism. But there is also a religious version, which consists in relying on a consecrated stage manager who extricates us from our problems like a *deus ex machina*.⁷

Fleeing from pessimism is, for us Salesians, almost *innate*. The *naïve* optimism of which he speaks is, however, not only a temptation much closer to us, but also a blur in an age defined as *post-optimistic*. Today’s Western society has moved from the chimera of indefinite progress and the “land without evil” to the prediction of an irreversibly dying world;

from extreme confidence to equally extreme distrust of the future. [...] Pollution of all kinds, social inequalities, economic disasters, the emergence of new diseases: this long litany of threats has plunged the future from extreme positivity to gloomy and equally extreme negativity.⁸

In a sharp and profound way, the essayist and former Czech president Václav Havel – whose advisor and close collaborator Halík had been – wrote to his wife from prison

Dear Olga, the most important thing of all for you is not to lose faith and hope. When I speak of faith and hope, I do not have in mind optimism in the conventional sense of the word, which usually expresses the conviction that “everything will be fine”. I do not share such a principle; I consider it a dangerous illusion — if expressed in such a general way. I do not know how “everything” will go and therefore I must also accept the possibility that everything, or at least most things, will go wrong. [...] A genuine faith is something incomparably deeper and more mysterious than some optimistic (or pessimistic) emotion, and *does not depend on how reality actually appears at any given moment*. And it is also for this reason that *only the man of faith, in the deepest sense of the term, is able to see things as they really are, and not to distort them*.⁹

This is fundamental. There is no doubt that we are living in difficult times. It is useless to *discount* it. But even worse would be to *allow oneself to be crushed* definitively as if nothing could be overcome, or to want to *ignore* it as if everything were fine.¹⁰ The Christian is neither a pessimist nor an optimist, but a *person with hope*, that is, one who is convinced not that things will always turn out well, but that *everything tends mysteriously towards the good, according to God’s plan* (cf. Rom 8:28) and that, *in this plan, everything has meaning regardless of its success*.

⁷ HALÍK, *La notte del confessore*, 14.

⁸ Miguel BENASAYAG – Gérard SCHMIT, *L’epoca delle passioni tristi*, Milano: Feltrinelli 2013, 18. 20.

⁹ Václav HAVEL, *Lettere a Olga*, Treviso: Santi Quaranta, 2010 [Letter of 17 January 1981].

¹⁰ Cf. Eduardo PIRONIO, *Renovación de la vida consagrada. Los “religiosos” testigos de la esperanza y de la alegría pascual*, Bogotá: Paulinas, 1977, 13-41.

There is more need for *real hope* when the situation is *at its worst*, in a state of extreme danger that optimism is usually reluctant to recognise. It would be better not to have hope, because its presence signals that something unpleasant has already happened. According to the Hebrew scriptures, for example, hope has a dark subtext, since it involves routing unbelievers. If there is a need for virtue, it is because there are a lot of delinquents around.¹¹

In this sense, it must be acknowledged that those who do not believe in Christ will not be able to say “it will end well” or “it will end badly” in the same sense in which a Christian says it, because human beings by themselves cannot hope for the ending that the Christian hopes for, nor understand good as he understands it.¹²

These ideas, which may seem alien to the usual way of thinking, are however in tune with what the Pope says in his Message

Neither pessimist nor optimist, the Salesian of the 21st century is someone filled with hope because he knows that his centre is the Lord who can make all things new (cf. Rev 21:5).

Taking up this situation responsibly – both on a personal and community level – involves leaving behind the kind of... *pessimistic outlook and attitude* towards everything around us... This is an attitude that ends up “boycotting” and preventing any kind of alternative response or process, and can give rise to the opposite stance: a *blind kind of optimism* that can dispel the strength and novelty of the Gospel, preventing us from *concretely accepting the complexity that situations require and the prophecy that the Lord invites us to carry out*. Neither pessimism nor optimism are gifts of the Spirit, because both come from a vision that puts the self at the centre, capable only of measuring oneself by one’s own strengths, capacities or abilities, preventing us from looking at what the *Lord is accomplishing and wants to accomplish among us* (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, 35).

1. So, our view of the world is based on the *certainty of faith* that, despite what happens, *God leads history, Christ acts through his grace, and the Holy Spirit generates the final creation in labour pains*, and this makes us live with *theological hope*.
2. From this certainty, hope is translated according to Halík as *the ability to make sense of events, especially those that “do not go well”, in the light of the paradox of Easter*, «so that we can *accept reality and its weight, persist in this situation, pass the test and, where possible, also be useful to others*».¹³ In fact, the resurrection is not the *happy ending* of death on the cross, but the *reinterpretation* of death as the cause of life. The one does not cancel out the other. The Risen One bears the marks of the Crucified One. The certainty that everything advances according to the promise towards «a new heaven and a new earth» (2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1) does not therefore deny that we are still walking «through the darkest valley» (Ps 22:4).
3. Finally, this hope in the fullness of life, which transcends death, is accredited to the present life, *transforming it through charity*. Seeking and living «the things that are above, where Christ is» (Col 3:1) does not absolve us from the commitments and duties of this world. Christian hope is always interwoven with charity: a full, living, integral charity, in the concreteness of every moment and context that we are passing through.

¹¹ Terry EAGLETON, *Speranza (senza ottimismo). Una guida filosofica*, Milano: Ponte alle grazie 2016, 16.

¹² Cf. Josef PIEPER, *Las virtudes fundamentales*, Madrid: Rialp 2017, 273. It is not by chance that St Paul reminds the Ephesians how, before their encounter with Christ, they were «without hope and without God in the world» (Eph 2:12).

¹³ HALÍK, *La notte del confessore*, 23.

Obviously, this is a *supernatural* view. In this *virtuous* vision, «faith, hope and charity go together» (cf. *1 Cor* 13:13).¹⁴ The three virtues refer to each other and support each other; we could say that they mutually represent a “test” (cf. *Heb* 11:1), a “support” on the way (cf. *2 Cor* 1:7; *Phil* 1:20; *1 Th* 5:8) and a “check” (cf. *Eph* 4:15, *Jas* 2:26).

2. Knowing, preserving and spreading great hope

If the *theological faith* makes us believe down here in the One whom we are waiting to see up there «face to face» (*1 Cor* 13:12), «as he is» (*1 Jn* 3:2), the *theological hope* sets us on a patient and persevering pilgrimage towards the encounter with Him with the confidence to arrive there (cf. *2 Tim* 2:5; *Jas* 1:1). Then, our life (cf. *Jn* 10:10), our joy (cf. *Jn* 15:11), our maturity (cf. *Eph* 4:13), our knowledge (cf. *Col* 3:10), our reward (cf. *2 Jn* 8) ... will be full, and this will not be taken away from us (cf. *Lk* 10:42). What else should we continue to seek (*Pss* 24:7)? Because it rests precisely on the promises of Christ (cf. *Heb* 10:23) rather than on our own strength, this hope, infused and guarded by the Holy Spirit, «does not disappoint» (*Rom* 5:5).

Since its being unknown is the cause of all despair,¹⁵ today it is a priority and decisive task to keep alive the concern to know, preserve and spread the *specificity of Christian hope*,¹⁶ in other words, to welcome with gratitude, preserve with fidelity and live in humility the unique and universal *novelty* that comes from the death and resurrection of Jesus and the horizons they open up.¹⁷ Without the certainty of this solid and positive ultimate meaning, it is almost impossible to have a *robust hope*. Without the certainty that everything is interwoven with solid and original meanings, the person is forced to *reduce hope* to something precarious, discontinuous, provisional. In a time dominated by immediate goods and focused on crumbs, Christians must therefore ask themselves about the strength of the «living hope» they carry with them (*1 Pet* 1:3). But do they still believe that there is a transcendent fulfilment for people's lives and the future of the world?¹⁸

3. Strengthening, purifying and deciphering in practice our many hopes

In a certain sense, *supernatural hope* takes on all the *natural hopes* that inspire human activities. Moreover, it expands them in the perspective of eternity, it preserves them from corruption, it purifies them in view of ordering them to the Kingdom of Heaven, and it certainly transcends them.¹⁹ It does not erase them, however; it grafts itself into them and tunes them. Incidentally, it would be impossible to remove them. Despite all

¹⁴ BENEDICT XVI, *Encyclical Letter «Deus Caritas Est» on Christian Love* (25 December 2005), n. 39, in «AAS» XCVIII (2006), 217-252.

¹⁵ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Encyclical Letter «Spe salvi» on Christian Hope* (30 November 2007), n. 12, in «AAS» XCIX (2007), 985-1027.

¹⁶ Cf. CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA, *Comunicare il Vangelo in un mondo che cambia*. Pastoral guidelines of the Italian Episcopate for the first decade of 2000 (29 June 2001), Milano: Paoline 2001, n. 2.

¹⁷ Cf. Dionigi TETTAMANZI, *Il dono di testimoni umili e coraggiosi*. Prolusion to the IV National Ecclesial Convention (16 October 2006), in “Il regno-Documenti” 51 (2006), 602-609, qui 603.

¹⁸ Cf. Franco MOSCONI – Salvatore NATOLI, *Sperare oggi*, Bologna: EDB 2021, 76.

¹⁹ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican City: LEV 1992, n. 1818.

their fragility and fleetingness,²⁰ in our decisions and actions we continue to invest in these earthly, finite, immanent hopes. Not only we individually, but also socially. In fact, the individual person lives within a network of relationships which is the *community*. The hopes of individuals flow into the community, and the hopes that sustain a community influence individuals. There is an osmosis of hope between individuals and society. This is why we also speak of *social hope*, meaning the passion with which a community “casts its gaze forward”, sets goals for itself, moves towards horizons of the future. *The thermometer of social hope is therefore planning*: where complaining, nostalgia and regret for the past prevail, the degree of social hope is low; it is high, on the contrary, where there is a spirit of initiative, the ability to dream and confidence in the future.²¹

3.1 Spirit of initiative

The voices that accuse *Christian hope* of being directed towards the future, deserting a true commitment to the present, only reveal their wrong understanding.²² In fact, hope, rather than being a flight into the future, is the *fruitful and leavening force* of caring for the present, of giving oneself in service, of taking charge of others, of cultivating the conditions that make life liveable and fruitful. Seeking the future dwelling place (cf. *Heb* 11:13-16; *Phil* 3:20) is anything but a simple postponement to later: those who have evangelical hope *inhabit, shape and transform daily existence*. The new society, in fact, is somehow embedded in the present society.²³ «The Church teaches that a hope related to the end of time does not diminish the importance of intervening duties, but rather undergirds the acquittal of them with fresh incentives».²⁴

From the point of view of practice, *Christian hope* unfolds in three stages: *reading and interpreting* the signs of hope present in the world, *offering* horizons of meaning that open up to hope, and *engaging* in concrete attitudes and behaviour that sustain hope.²⁵

1. First of all, those who have Christian hope *see and enjoy* the countless number of seeds, sprouts and concrete fruits of hope that are at work in the most diverse spheres and subjects, including in the most disadvantaged and suffering realities and events of ordinary life. The hopes of people today, especially of all those who suffer, are also the hopes of Christ's disciples, proclaimed Vatican II.²⁶ They see them in the many men and women who, «busy at work in their daily life and activity, oftentimes far from view and quite unacclaimed by the world, unknown to the world's great personages but nonetheless looked upon in love by the Father, untiring labourers who work in the Lord's vineyard. Confident and steadfast through the power of God's grace, these are the humble yet great builders of the Kingdom of God in history».²⁷ They see them in the saints “next

²⁰ Cf. Virgilio MELCHIORRE, *Sulla speranza*, Brescia: Morcelliana 2000, 7.

²¹ Erio CASTELLUCCI, *Seminatori di speranza*. Address to the city on the solemnity of St Geminianus (31 January 2019).

²² Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Gaudium et spes*. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (7 December 1965), n. 20, in «AAS» 58 (1966) 15, 1025-1120.

²³ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Spe salvi*, n. 5.

²⁴ VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Gaudium et spes*, n. 21.

²⁵ Cf. TETTAMANZI, *Il dono di testimoni umili e coraggiosi*, 607.

²⁶ VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Gaudium et spes*, n. 1.

²⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Christifideles laici*. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World (30 December 1988), n. 17, in «AAS» 81 (1989) 4, 393-521.

door” who go forward with patience and “struggling with hope”.²⁸ Especially in these times of pandemic, they see them in those who, instead of “fleeing in the hope of saving themselves”, remain and commit themselves “with effort and sacrifice” so that the situation will be less bitter.²⁹

2. Humanly speaking, hope is not an object that is held and can be given. Rather, it is an exercise that *each person* must do starting from the discovery of horizons that keep him or her in tension, and despite the risk of illusions or deception. And yet, there is a need for *witnesses* who can in some way *indicate* a path, *show* certainty, *allow* the presence of the One who is one’s hope *to shine through* (cf. *1 Tim 1:1*) and *strengthen* the sense of entrustment to his providence.³⁰ Those who have Christian hope, therefore, share those *reasons for living* that move them and give them direction, and which can perhaps open up in others breaches through which the Spirit can sow a *firmer hope*.³¹
3. Finally, those who have Christian hope *commit* themselves to concrete actions and conduct. From what has been said before, it emerges that the first way to strengthen hope is to *be close* to others. The story of the “desperate men of Emmaus” teaches us that in order to set out again «without delay» (*Lk 24:33*), the two disciples had to recognise in a new light (cf. *Lk 24:31*) what they had previously known inexplicably, without understanding its meaning (cf. *Lk 24:25*). Also, that in order to re-understand in a new way the meaning of what had happened, they also needed a traveller to *stay* with them, to *offer* them a new horizon of interpretation, to *convert* their minds, to *heal* them of disappointment and to *warm* their wounded hearts. Especially in the despair that comes from loneliness – physical, social, affective but also spiritual – or from the suffering and bewilderment it causes, ‘being-with’ can be experienced as ‘con-solation’³² and, therefore, as a presence that remains, a welcoming that heals, a closeness that comforts, a relationship that knits fragments together, an affection that reconnects.³³ In situations of confusion, discomfort, abandonment... the desire to be there calls for the choice to invest in relationships as a concrete way of sustaining hope beyond material needs.

It is striking that in the Book of Revelation, the image that expresses the concrete way of being close to those who suffer is to wipe the tears from the eyes of those who weep. It is through this practice that concrete hope can be created and aroused. It is in the face of the desperate that we must measure the authenticity of our hope and our capacity to create hope. Without this test, the reference to hope risks being mere rhetoric.³⁴

²⁸ FRANCIS, *Gaudete et exsultate*. Apostolic Exhortation on the Call to Holiness in Today’s World (19 March 2018), nos. 7, 154, in «AAS» 110 (2018) 8, 1111-1161.

²⁹ FRANCIS, *Un piano per risorgere* (17 April 2020), in «L’Osservatore Romano» CLX/48412 (2020) 88, 10.

³⁰ Cf. Luciano SANDRIN, *Prendersi cura della speranza*, in Chiara PALAZZINI (ed.), *Le relazioni che curano*, Città del Vaticano: LUP 2013, 13-34.

³¹ Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Gaudium et spes*, nn. 21, 31, 93.

³² Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Spe salvi*, n. 38.

³³ Cf. Jerome GROOPMAN, *Anatomia della speranza. Come reagire davanti alla malattia*, Milano: V&P 2006.

³⁴ Luciano MANICARDI, *La comune responsabilità per l’umano*. A reflection proposed on the occasion of a training day addressed to some operators of Caritas Ambrosiana (26 February 2008).

But this is not enough. Implementing hope entails the responsibility of *taking charge* of concrete situations and striving to bring them more and more in line with God's plan. «From our actions springs hope for us and for others».³⁵ Starting from being present and knowing how to welcome, teaching the uninformed, caring for the sick, helping the poor, sheltering the abandoned, visiting the lonely or protecting the elderly can be seedbeds in which hope can be born. In this sense, *charity verifies the hope that faith generates*. The facts, even though they may start from simple realities, are capable of piercing the absence of hope and, moreover, of provoking attention, generating other actions, multiplying changes.

Further still. If Christian hope is *actively* exercised through charity and concern for one's neighbour, it is also exercised *passively* through patience and endurance. *Patience*, because if the believer is certain that God fulfils his promises and that his Kingdom is already at work in our midst (cf. *Lk* 17:21), he also knows that he is living in the *not yet*, and therefore refuses the presumptuous temptation to find security in possessions that one does not know when they will be taken from him (cf. *Lk* 12:20). *Resistance*, because we live in a context that suppresses hope, many times nipping it in the bud and not echoing positive things. Usually, what a person dreams of and plans ahead is quickly resisted or questioned, almost always downwards. Think of young people and of the sharp talk to which they have to adjust rather than dream. Think of those who take on a responsibility with novelty and freshness and all the steps they have to climb to reach their goal. Think of those who try to breathe enthusiasm into life and are slapped down by the "that's what there is" or "what can you do?" of the well-worn and resigned.

3.2 Ability to dream

Dreaming is not fantasizing, rambling, ranting, just as dreams are not mirages, delusions, hallucinations or chimeras. Starting from reality, those who dream *project* the present towards a perfective goal, they *envisage* other lifestyles, they *imagine* alternative communities... and they operate an *invention of meaning* that gives a *different liveability* to the present. Those who reasonably hope for the fulfilment of the desired goal, therefore, do not build so much on the basis of *what* they see in the present, but act instead on the basis of *how* they see the present in the light of the envisaged future. In this sense, the Pope would say, dreaming allows us to keep our eyes wide open, it takes us towards a horizon, it suggests a path that allows us to embrace it, it takes us forward, it cultivates our hope in every daily action. Of course, «dreams must be made to grow, they must be purified, they must be tested and they must also be shared»³⁶. And then they must be made concrete. The work and responsibility of those who dream is to transform today into reality what is foreseen for tomorrow. On the one hand, this requires courage in the face of resistance, constancy in the face of difficulties, resilience in the face of falls; on the other, openness, trust, reliance on significant people who can help understand dreams and make them concrete in a gradual and serene manner. It is precisely from the ability not only to *dream*, but to *choose*, to *implement*, to *persevere*, to *risk* and to *involve* that the difference between an idealist and an implementer is shaped.

³⁵ BENEDICT XVI, *Spe salvi*, n. 35.

³⁶ FRANCESCO, *Sognate in grande*. Dialogue during the Prayer Vigil with Italian youth (11 August 2018).

Those who have Christian hope finally discern from where their dreams are inspired, their quality and greatness, their fruitfulness. Indeed, they think about how to articulate their dreams with the “dreams of God” for each and for all and, therefore, how to commit themselves to a more brotherly humanity.³⁷ From this perspective, Christian hope, thanks to the novelty of the contents of faith and, in concrete terms, thanks to the experience of God and man that it generates and nourishes, possesses an exceptional power to *redefine* horizons, to *transform* vision, to *qualify* steps. This novelty of the contents of faith is seen in a conception of the person, of the beginning and end of life, of the nature of interpersonal and social relationships, of education and the transmission of values, of charity and solicitude towards others, of the modes of citizenship and legality [and] of the figures of coexistence between religions and cultures.

3.3 Confidence in the future

Talking about confidence in the future may seem like something for naïve do-gooders or, at the very least, unrealistic, given the demographic, economic and health crisis we are currently experiencing. And yet, it is a condition for each of us to be able to live in the present, exercising our responsibilities in a fruitful manner and deploying the gifts and talents we discover within ourselves.³⁸ Humanly speaking, however, what makes us hope for the future is not the future itself – which may even be *utopian* or *dystopian*, depending on who thinks of it – but the present, from which a *eutopian future* can be built. Therefore, *trust in the future* is strongly linked to *trust in the present*. There are, for example, many processes of social disintegration, but there are also many resources that are put in place as antibodies to oppose the worst drifts. There are many environmental threats, but there are also many energies at work in the awareness that the problem is serious and must be addressed. There are many disastrous situations for various reasons, but there are also many who roll up their sleeves to rebuild. In this sense, it is said that something will have a future “if” certain conditions are met; but this “if”, insofar as it is assumed and implemented in the present, is precisely what gives us hope that things can be different.

For those who have Christian hope, there are further and more well-founded reasons to trust in the future. It belongs to God,

in the sense that he alone knows it, prepares it and brings it about. Of course, he calls for and invites human co-operation, but he never ceases to be the transcendent “director” of history [...] Only God knows how the future will be. We know, however, that in any event it will be a future of grace; it will be the fulfilment of a divine plan of love for all humanity and for each one of us.³⁹

4. Educating from, with, in and to hope

³⁷ Cf. Claudio BORGHI, *Sogni di Dio, speranza per l'uomo*, Roma: San Paolo 2018.

³⁸ Cf. Mario DELPINI, *Benvenuto, futuro!* Address to the city (6 December 2019), Milano: Centro Ambrosiano 2019, 7.

³⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *The future of man is first of all God's future*. Catechesis at the General Audience (19 November 1997).

To conclude. We talk about education *as* an act of hope. Also, of educating *from* hope, *with* hope, *in* hope.⁴⁰ What does it mean to educate *to* hope today? It is to educate: to *discover* within the places of everyday life all the signs of meaning and of the future, to *appreciate* and *thank* for small gestures. To *abandon* pessimistic, bitter, dark, defeatist thoughts, but also those ingenuously optimistic, naïve, idyllic, illusory ones. To *react with resilience*, never remaining down, getting up, setting out, allowing oneself to be helped. To *support* others, backing them up, accompanying them towards maturing, helping them to live deeply, especially in difficult experiences. To *know* one's limits and be patient with them. To *associate* with people who keep a sense of wonder in their hearts. To *cultivate ideals* that allow one to live for something that goes beyond one's own present moment. To *dream* of a world that one cannot see yet, but that will come if one builds in the present, despite uncertainties. To *mature free and conscious choices* that, by remembering the past, lead one to take care of the present and project it towards tomorrow. To *think* of new ways that are appropriate to the new context in which we are moving today. To *seek together* to find solutions; to *initiate processes* of transformation; to *trust* in God, handing everything over to Him in prayer and believing in the existence of a creation that extends to its definitive fulfilment.⁴¹

5. Sustaining our hope

In fact, «a first essential setting for learning hope is prayer».⁴² In difficult times, Christ too experienced discouragement, bewilderment, worry, fear. But in his journey through difficult times, Christ neither fled nor suppressed them, but rather taught us to overcome them with serenity and strength and to give them meaning. It is precisely *in prayer that the Lord discovers the fruitfulness of difficult times and decides accordingly*: «Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour! Father, glorify your name» (*Jn* 12:27).

Anxiety or the illusion of the immediate can make us lose sight of the depth of reality and the presence of what is definitive. But prayer:

- *strengthens us with the certainty of the Lord's presence* with us «every day» (*Mt* 28:20), even the dark ones: «Take courage, it is I» (*Mk* 6:50);
- *places us in a humble and docile listening to the Word of God*. There we savour the history of salvation and learn to taste how God «visited his people and redeemed them» (*Lk* 1:68). There we understand specifically how God can part the waters for the crossing of the elect and then can gather them to drown the persecutors (cf. *Ex* 14:21-29). There we understand how a shepherd boy without armour can overcome the giant who threatened his people (cf. *1 Sam* 17:49);
- *makes us discern the present time*. It enables us to see far and deep. It makes us discover God's saving plan in the midst of bewildering and absurd human events. It reveals to us why things happen (cf. *Rm* 8:20-22). It makes us realise that our ways are not God's ways (cf. *Is* 55:8);

⁴⁰ Cf. FRANCIS, *Rebuilding the Global Compact on Education*. Message for the launch (12 September 2019).

⁴¹ Cf. FRANCIS, *Teaching Hope*. Catechesis at the General Audience (20 September 2017).

⁴² BENEDICT XVI, *Spe salvi*, n. 32.

- *makes us discover God's plan, the Lord's passage through history, the Spirit's ceaselessly recreating activity.* The praying person understands three things: that only God counts, that Jesus lives with us and accompanies us on our pilgrimage to the Father, and that eternity has already begun and we journey with Christ towards the fulfilment of the Kingdom (cf. *1 Cor 15:24*);
- *helps us to decipher the Mystery* (cf. *Lk 24:31*), overcomes fear (cf. *Acts 4:17-20*), helps us to taste the joy and fruitfulness of suffering (cf. *Gal 6:14; Col 1:24; Jn 12:24*), strengthens our availability (cf. *Mt 26:39*);
- *makes us discover signs of "anthropological hope" in the situations in which we find ourselves*, even though they are partial and ambivalent. The contemplative gaze is imbued with the sensitivity needed to be able to recognise the small mustard seed and to be certain that, when it grows, it will become «a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches» (*Mt 13:31-32*). It knows that if there is any anticipation for the future, signs are expected in the present, so it never curses the present;
- *communicates to us, always in the glimmer of faith, what God wants from us* (cf. *Lk 10:25; Acts 22:10*). In prayer we perceive, above all, that «for God all things are possible» (*Mk 10:27*), that salvation can come from the unexpected (cf. *Jn 1:46*) and that we must know how to be patient (cf. *Rm 5:4*);
- *gives us serenity.* In general, people who do not have the time and peace to pray and purify their eyes become anxious and desperate. Prayerful people, on the other hand, are bearers of peace, and by their testimony they introduce us to the invisible of God, making us experience His presence;
- *rebalances us inwardly* by putting us in contact with Jesus Christ «our peace» (*Eph 2:14*), with the Spirit who «helps us in our weakness» (*Rm 8:26*), with the Father who cares for us (cf. *Heb 2:16*).