

PILGRIMS OF HOPE

1. Listen to the Word: Rm 5:1-5

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access [by faith] to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope, and 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.

2. Remain in the Word

The main theme of the Letter to the Romans is the faith-based salvation that God gives to humanity. It can be said that the first verses of chapter 5 act as a "hinge" connecting the part on justification (chapters 1-4) with the part on salvation (chapters 5-11). These words emphasize that justification and salvation are free gifts which God gives to humanity through the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ.

If the theme of the Jubilee 2025, "Hope does not disappoint," indicates the fruit of Christian hope, the reason expressed below, "because the love of God has been poured into our hearts" (Rom 5:5) shows the root of this hope.

"Hope does not disappoint" - the full fruit in the present

To list what believers are already benefiting from, "Justified therefore by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1), Saint Paul uses all the verbs of the present time. Next, to show that God has granted us "grace upon grace" (Jn 1:16), the Apostle lists the divine gifts in a kind of consequential connection.

When one is "at peace with God", one also has "access" to His grace (cf. Rom 5:1-2). And then, the state of life in the grace of God not only allows us to boast, "In the hope of the glory of God" but also "in afflictions" (Rom 5:2-3). This stems not from a heroic attitude of the person, but from the awareness that the virtues are cultivated day after day, step by step because, "Affliction produces endurance and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope" (Rom 5:3-4).

"The love of God has been poured out into our hearts – Firmly rooted in the past, a secure foundation for the future

The two parts of verse 5 are connected by the conjunction "because" - a short and simple word, but which emphasizes the certainty that the fundamental reason for "hope that does not disappoint" is precisely the love of God. In the original Greek text, the verbs, expressed in the passive divine form, unambiguously underline the priority initiative of God's action. God's love *has been poured* into our hearts and the Holy Spirit *has been given* to us (cf. Rom 5:5). God is the first to act, the sower who spreads the good seed, the giver who gives and remains hidden, but whose gifts are the root, the foundation of what we hope for.

The past tense of the verbs in the second part of verse 5 and the following verses (Rom 5:6-11) further highlights the initiative of God. It is not only a chronological anticipation, but above all, a superiority in love. "Now, hardly anyone is willing to die for a righteous person; perhaps someone would dare to die for a good person. But God shows His love for us in the fact that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:7-8).

If the merciful love of God, manifested in the sacrifice of the life of the only-begotten Son, is the foundation of "hope that does not disappoint", it is the same love that opens to us the hope of being "saved by his life" (Rom 5:10). Thus, the future becomes not only a promise, but also a certainty; a goal already reached for us by Christ, who makes every step on the path of life more solid and decisive.¹

¹ Cf. MARTOGLIO Stefano, *Strenna 2025 - "Anchored in hope, pilgrims with the young"*, p. 10.

3. Illumined by the Word

In the Jubilee of Hope, the life of Venerable Cardinal Francis Nguyen Van Thuan shines as a credible testimony that arouses praise, awareness, imitation.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his address to the officials and collaborators of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the death of Cardinal François-Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan, stated, "Cardinal Van Thuan was a man of hope; he lived with hope and spread it among all those he met. It was thanks to this spiritual energy that he withstood all the physical and moral difficulties. Hope sustained him as a Bishop isolated for 13 years from his diocesan community; hope helped him to glimpse in the absurdity of the events befalling him - he was never tried during his long imprisonment - a providential design of God."² Speaking of the role of prayer as food for hope, Pope Benedict XVI recalled the example of the Cardinal, "During thirteen years of imprisonment, in a situation of apparently total despair, listening to God, being able to speak to Him, became for him a growing force of hope, so that after his release, it allowed him to become for people all over the world a witness of hope - of that great hope that even in the nights of solitude does not end."³

4. Pray with the Word

In the second week of the Month of Gratitude, we remember in a special way the young people who - "in themselves represent hope"⁴ – and migrants, "who leave their land in search of a better life for themselves and their families."⁵

With the words of Cardinal Francesco Nguyen Van Thuan, we can address the Lord with this prayer: "Jesus, I will not wait; I live the present moment, filling it with love. The straight line is made up of millions of small dots joined together. My life is also made up of millions of seconds and minutes connected to each other. I perfectly arrange every single point and the line will be straight. I live every minute with perfection and life will be holy. The path of hope is paved with small steps of hope. The life of hope is made of short minutes of hope."⁶

Questions for reflection:

- Do my words, my attitude, and my way of acting nourish the hope of my Sisters, young people, and collaborators?
- How can my community be a credible sign of hope for the young, the poor, and the migrants around us?

5. Together with Mary to live the Word

In the silence of the years spent with Jesus in Nazareth, we can imagine what they left in Mary. Mary let her hope be nourished by the Word, in contemplation and trusting abandonment to the guidance of God's provident love. Her words of spontaneous but profound praise in the Magnificat show how she never stopped 'counting the graces' of God in her own life and in the history of her people (cf. Lk 1:46-55).

Mary is a model of constant orientation towards God in daily life, especially at times when we encounter difficulties and obstacles as we sow the Gospel of hope (cf. Lk 2:19/51; Jn 2:1-5).

O Virgin of Hope, our Mother and Teacher,

grant that, together with You, we may proclaim hope to others, young people and migrants. Amen!

² BENEDICT XVI, in www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/it/speeches/2007/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070917_card-van-thuan.pdf.

³ BENEDICT XVI, *Spe Salvi*, n. 32.

⁴ Cf. FRANCIS, *Spes non confundit*, n. 12.

⁵ *Ivi*, n. 13.

⁶ NGUYEN Van Thuan, *Five loaves and two fish. From the suffering of prison a joyful testimony of faith*, Milan, Editions San Paolo 1997, 20-21.