



# Theology Corner

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## “The Theological Virtues – Hope”

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As I wrote in the last Theology Corner, I mentioned that over the next couple of months we are going to look at the Church’s understanding of virtue, beginning with the three theological virtues of: **Faith, Hope and, Charity**. We began with the first of the three – faith. In this week’s article, we will key in on the second of the theological virtues – Hope. Hope is the theological virtue that gives us a trust in knowing that we can attain ultimate happiness through a life of faith. Like faith, hope is a theological virtue precisely because God is the one who makes the first move by calling us to him and extending his grace to us. We experience this love of God in different ways. For myself personally, hope has given me the strength to know that when I struggle through the temptations of sin, avoiding its near occasions will pay off both in a true peace in my heart here on earth, and as a lasting happiness in the beatific vision (heaven). Or even with the recent passing of my father, I have hope that God will invite him in with open arms. Do we sometimes lose hope? Of course! Just as we sometimes lose faith. This is not because God withholds these from us, but because we sometimes fail to cooperate with him even though he unceasingly calls us into communion with him.

Through the virtue of hope, God aids us by giving us the grace to endure our hardships and trials and helping us view life in terms of our purpose and destination. Looked at another way, God gives us hope to help us look past the pains of our crosses and see the joy of the resurrection. Hope allows us to see things outside of our narrow scope of understanding, to step out of ourselves and view things from the eternal perspective. In other words, it allows us to move beyond our particular experiences and helps us to see things in a more universal way which points us to God. Hope is looking forward and knowing that what you may endure today will bring about a better tomorrow. It is precisely through this, that we can begin to see the interconnection between faith and hope. As I mentioned last week, faith isn’t just another word for trust, because it entails a movement of God by which he brings us up into himself and gives us a real participation in his life. Likewise, hope allows us to transcend our nature and gives us a limited knowledge of the end so that our wills will follow from what our intellect knows through the light of faith, as we answer God’s call and move toward him in response. This understanding allows us to distinguish the virtue of hope from mere optimism, since hope is a true conviction which naturally flows from the virtue of faith, thus adding greater clarity to whatever situation we may find ourselves in as well as a stronger resolve to stand firm in our faith. As Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI said in his Encyclical on Christian hope (*Spe Salvi*), **“A distinguishing mark of Christians [is] the fact that they have a future; it is not that they know the details of what awaits them, but they know in general terms that their life will not end in emptiness.”**

A prime example of the gift of hope is found in the story of Job. Even though he lost everything he had, in the end, Job did not lose hope. The moment when Job questions God, instead of returning Job’s question with an answer, God turns the tables and interrogates him instead. In this scene of chapter 38, God essentially asks Job, “who created the universe and knows all things?” While this may seem trivial at first glance, this pulls Job away from his own personal experiences to see the bigger picture that was really right in front of him the whole time. It caused him to look at things from a “God’s eye view” (eternal perspective). Though we can never know everything that God does, for we are limited beings and thus limited in our capacity for complete knowledge, hope gives us glimpse into the mind of God and brings comfort and strength to those who hope in the Lord. As the Psalmist says, **“I will always hope in you and add to all your praise. My mouth shall proclaim your just deeds, day after day your acts of deliverance, though I cannot number them all”** (Ps 71:14-15).

How does hope really differ from faith? Well, the gift of faith is when God reveals to us his will and the truths about God being the ultimate object of our happiness. Hope, as I mentioned above, flows from this revelation in that once we assent to the will of God in faith, we are then given the grace to cling to him in the midst of all sorts of hardships that we face along the journey. Hope gives us a clear mind so that we can see through all the temptations of the world and all of our painful experiences, and still remain fixated on Christ in joyful hope for “the resurrection of the dead and life of the world to come.”