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### CHRISTIAN HOPE:

Firstborn child of the Resurrection

"Faith is the Sanctuary-lamp . . . Charity is that great fire of wood . . . but my hope (God says) is the flower and the fruit and the leaf and the branch and the sprig and the growth and the germ and the bud. And she is the growth and the bud and the flower of Eternity itself." So writes the French poet, Peguy, of Faith the loyal wife, Charity the fervent mother and hope the very little girl. It is Peguy's genius to recognize it is actually little hope who is leading the other two. He used capitals for Faith and Charity, but hope is generally without one. Perhaps it was his humility, perhaps because she was so little, or perhaps, I say it with great reverence and respect,

he never knew Christian Hope. Our Lord indicated this difficulty when he admonished us: "Pray always and don't loose heart." The answer to our prayer is that we don't loose Hope but the hope which inspires our prayer isn't necessarily the Hope which is born of it. Christian Hope is an especially peculiar breed of hope.

During Advent and throughout the Christmas Season, we experience our Christian Hope as an already possessing of what we hope for but not in the way it will be possessed. With every creature we look forward to the fullness of being and the freedom of the children of God. In the one Hope we



know that Christ has come and that in his dead and risen humanity we already possess the rudiments of the glory we hope to obtain. It is a Hope that looks backward to what already was and forward to something which is not yet. Our NOW is the dynamic interchange of this strange mix.

During the public life of Jesus we witness the change in the hope of the disciples which is quite like the change that can take place in our own hope. He gradually becomes so different from what they hoped that they gradually lost both heart and that hope. It is necessary that we loose our firstborn hope. They regained heart and Hope but it was only in this regained state, now considerably transformed and even transfigured and transubstantiated, that we can speak of Christian Hope.

If you can become like a little child for a moment, it may help to get a handle on this rather odd phenomenon of Christian Hope. Imagine that it is last Christmas and you are longing for a cabbage patch doll with all the hope of your aching heart and bones. Consider for a moment the persons from whom you hope to receive this wonderful doll. They are the suppliers-of-cabbage-patch-dolls. What or who else are they? As long as your hope is on that doll, they can be no more than the suppliers-of-cabbage-patch-dolls. Because you are locked into this one hope, you have thereby locked them into a category which completely defines them. Can that person get across to you their love? They cannot! You'd insist they could, but you don't realize you have defined love in terms of the cabbage patch doll. That is what happens with all our self-centered hopes. Can you recognize their love for you? No, you cannot. It is a hopeful situation with regard cabbage patch dolls, but that anything else be communicated, it is hopeless.

Unless something happens to the doll, or to you, you are stuck with one hope — that scraggly doll. And it is hopeless for anyone to try to get anything else across to you: truth, care, or Hope included. As the child, you have to be able to see through the gift, even through your parents as the givers-of-the-gift, to a goodness or beauty or quality in them more wonderful than that of doll-giver which doesn't relate only to you. Or there are just more dolls coming.

You, as this child, need to get over a perfectly natural self-centeredness. You need to change your attachment to the doll. You need to experience the goodness of the other which is not related to your hope. Finally, you need to realize the other initiated the process of gift giving to begin with. It was not cause and effect: in other words, it didn't happen through your manipulation.

It is similar for ourselves and God in the context of Christ. What is central is not what we hope for but what he hopes for. Quite a change must take place in the core of our being for this to happen. A certain waiting and patient endurance is essential

to it. Finally, we need to recognize the initiative of God in our lives — it is not the answer to our prayers. Otherwise we are manipulating God, a thing Christ refused to do in his desert temptation.

We are rather like the child in that our hope is always for some **thing** to which we can attach ourselves. This thing will bring happiness and fulfillment, or at least it will be a means to happiness and fulfillment. This is neither Christian Hope nor hope in God. God is no-thing. True, everything comes from God and is capable of leading us back to God. For this to happen, all four of the "needs" mentioned above must be operative. This allowing ourselves to be led by the thing is an example of a change in attachment to the thing. The other three must take place as well to unlock our childish and unchristian hope. Neither the apostles nor we seem to realize how difficult and painful a process it is to come to know by experience that only the Lord and his reign are worth waiting for and hoping for. A willingness must come about in the core of our selves that allows the depth of our being to change in accord with this Hope.

Our Advent Hope is seasoned and altered during that part of the year when we follow the Lord in his active ministry. We come to realize that what may begin as a personal hope towards God and eternal life is incapable of fulfillment in any recognizably Christian sense, if it remains an individual or merely subjective hope. It shocks us when we first hear it but the active ministry of Jesus was incomplete and insufficient to sustain Christian Hope. Christianity is ultimately based on the total work of Christ and therefore includes his death and resurrection. The humanity of the risen Lord is the same humanity he had on earth, but it has been profoundly affected since his death by the power of God. For one thing, it is no longer individual. It comprises a new unity not only with God but also with certain human people. For hope to be Christian, it must at some point be involved in this unity which is the total Christ. To be Christian doesn't mean to be an individual who follows the individual Jesus Christ and who derives his hopes from the teaching and parables of his active ministry. Christian has always meant someone who is related to the unity which is Christ, both head and members.

Canon IV of the Mass says the work of Christ was completed by his sending the Spirit "So that we can live no longer for ourselves but for him." In other words, what was not possible for anyone before Pentecost, including Mary and the apostles, is now possible for people in historical time. This is what Jesus means by the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the Baptist. Our situation after the death and resurrection of the Lord and his gift of the Spirit is different from the situation of anyone who lived before Pentecost. Our Hope can arise from the unity which is Christ and God and ourselves. Their hope could not rise until he had risen.



At one stroke, our self-centeredness is replaced by the new center of our life hidden with Christ in God: God is our possession for ever: the goodness we experience is the relationship within God and into whose fellowship we are called and united: the God who loved us first sent Jesus to embody that love in a way that would engage our human response. God didn't need to do this for us: God loves to do this for everyone and everything.

It is this new "us", personal, certainly, and unique in each of us, but precisely as the visible unity of the Beloved Community — this new us which is the seed of Hope and the Sprig and the Growth and the Germ and the Bud, the seed of glory, the new leaven

the world awaits in hope to be kneaded into its mass, its Mass, and its masses.

*Fr Martin*

## NEWS ITEMS:

- Br Victor Kenney of Philadelphia made final profession and received monastic consecration of 2 February, the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord. It was a special joy to celebrate this event with Br Victor's family and a number of Oblates and friends. Baptism originates in God's eternal love and is manifest in God's saving acts in history. Old Testament events such as the Exodus are its analogues. The Supporting Faith of the Church in our individual baptisms is its present sign and the Sacrament looks forward to its completion when we are plunged into the fullness of divine life in the final resurrection. Br Victor's profession presents us with that totality as he lives it out among us. We are enormously grateful to him, to his family and friends, and to the entire monastic tradition which are now part of the Mystery of Christ in our midst.
- The Community of Christ in the Desert asked to be separated from us and to join the Subiaco Congregation. The transfer was effected in early January. We pray they will receive every blessing in their new situation.
- Mt Saviour and 12 other Trappist and Benedictine communities were hosts to three Tibetan monks during the course of the Summer and Fall of 83. We were deeply impressed by the authenticity and dedication of these men and moved with compassion for their suffering and exile. We were able to share their visit with the wider Corning-Elmira community.
- We took the opportunity of the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's birth and Baptism to invite Professor Douglas John Hall of the Religious Studies Dept of McGill University to speak to us and to the Lutheran congregations in our area.
- Our annual Hospitality Day, the Fall Festival, will be 16 Sept this year. Last year's celebration was

a very fine one and we received such favorable comment on the simplified format of the Day and such praise for the prizes made of the wool of our flock, that we will do it in a similar way again this year. We appreciate Saving Stamps and volunteer help on 16 Sept.

- We are deeply grateful to our visitors who share their faith and lives with us. We would like to mention Fr Bernard de Soos OSB, Director of Aide-Inter-Monasteries, a Secretariat established by the Benedictine Abbots in 1961 to assist the monasteries of the young churches of the Third World. Fr Bernard showed us slides of West African monasteries and Dzogbegan in Togo, Africa where he was Prior for 15 yrs and which now has a native Superior.

- Sister Marie Julianne SSMN, former Provincial of the Sisters of St Mary of Namur has been working at a refugee center in Thailand. Again we appreciated the technology that enables us to see photographic slides of the life there. Justice and Peace do not exist for these refugees. Prayer, courage, money, and political action must come from us to these homeless. We have no permanent home here either and must live that truth.



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