

“Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope” St. Peter tells us in today’s 2<sup>nd</sup> reading. The reason for our hope... Where is our hope? What signs are there of hope? What can we hope in? These seem very applicable questions for us today – especially on the heels of the 1<sup>st</sup> Apostolic visit of Pope Benedict XVI to our country – the theme of which was “Christ, our Hope.” Let’s look at hope in our own lives.



## LESSON: Hope in our Lives

First of all, it might be good for us to remember and define hope. “Hope,” according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ’s promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit.” Wow, that’s a mouthful – let’s look at that:

✍ Hope is a theological virtue:

- This means that the object of our hope is not winning the lottery or anything of our own doing – but the object of our hope is God alone!
- Hope directs us toward God and the happiness we are promised with Him in eternal life.
- Hope is also a confident expectation that we will enjoy eternal life with God in heaven

✍ But hope has two extremes:

? Presumption – no matter what I do – God will love me and forgive me and welcome me into heaven. While it is true that God DOES love us and WILL forgive us any sin, we cannot continue sinning, saying to ourselves, “Oh, God will forgive me – I’ll just go to confession tomorrow (or even worse, I don’t need to go to confession because God will forgive me no matter what). We must not PRESUME God’s mercy – rather, we TRUST in His undying mercy when we have fallen into sin through human weakness. We cannot give ourselves *permission* to continue sinning by *presuming* God’s mercy.

? Despair: but the other end of the spectrum here is despair

- I am SUCH a terrible sinner, God will NEVER forgive me... I’m just too rotten!
- Remember that our lives are often lives on a “see-saw” – we struggle to stand, balanced, in the middle – not going too far to one end or the other.



- We cannot despair of God’s mercy, nor can we presume it. We struggle and try, and when we fail, we trust in God’s love and forgiveness.
- ✍ Hope is also “placing our trust in Christ’s promises and relying not on our own strength”
  - I think THIS is the hard part – place our trust in Christ and His promises – not in ourselves.

✍ What did Christ promise?

- ? To remain with us – and He does in the great gift of the Holy Eucharist.
- ? To show us the way to happiness – and He did through His teaching and witness
- ? To show us how to love – and He did as He gave his own life on the cross – giving us the example to follow
- ? To send the Holy Spirit to strengthen and guide us – and He did on the day of Pentecost – and in giving us the Office of St. Peter – the Papacy – the Holy Father – who preserves us in the truth.



✍ But so many of us fail to trust in God – but think that we can do it ourselves – that we are the one’s in control – that we can decide for ourselves. Here our hope is not in God, but in self.

✍ Faith places hope in God – not in self. And this was the message that Pope Benedict was bringing to Catholics here in the United States.

## ILLUSTRATION: Pope Benedict’s Journey to the US

I would bet that, like me, many of you were glued to your TV sets last week as Pope Benedict traveled around Washington & New York. How exciting it was to have the Vicar of Christ, the Successor of St. Peter only a few hundred miles from where we are right now! And how reassuring to hear his message: “Christ is our hope!”

What are our reasons for hope? Let’s remember the reasons for hope that the Holy Father pointed out to us last week:

- ✍ The Church in the United States has always been a sign of hope, he pointed out. How many schools and hospitals have been established here to bring the hope of Christ into the lives of the young and the sick and dying?
- ✍ The Church must be a beacon of hope in today’s world – promoting a culture of life.



✍ “This is the message of hope we are called to proclaim and embody in a world where self-centeredness, greed, violence and cynicism so often seem to choke the fragile growth of grace in people’s hearts.”

✍ The increasing awareness among our young people of the need for Christ is a great sign of hope, the Holy Father said. He even noted the increasing number of seminarians and religious sisters as a tremendous sign of hope in our self-centered culture – a life lived for others and for God, not for self.



✍ Even in the midst of scandal, the sexual abuse scandal, the Church can stand forth as a sign of hope – in her ministry and care and concern for those who were so unjustly abused by priests.

✍ Again and again, the Holy Father reminded us, the Catholics of the United States, to be signs of hope for the entire world – and the greatest way to do this is through the holiness of our lives – the celebration of the Sacraments – especially reconciliation.

✍ The Holy Father’s entire trip is a call to us to return to Christ as the source of all our hope for true freedom and happiness (not only in heaven, but even here on earth).

## **APPLICATION: Signs of Hope here in our own Parish**

Reflection on the Holy Fathers words and visit, I’ve been thinking and praying about the signs of hope which are present here in our own parish and community:

✍ The vitality of our parish

- Not long ago, we were a struggling parish and school, sleepy and somewhat dormant. **NO LONGER!** Look at the vitality of our parish, so many organizations and ministries (visitors to the sick, ministry to our youth, the thrift shop reaching out to the poor, providing meals for the bereaved, transportation to Mass for those otherwise unable to attend). So many who take a meaningful part in the Mass each week – not only in the pews, but in bringing the gifts, or serving at the altar or proclaiming God’s Word.

✍ The vision our parish has for growth

- Now, we no longer lament what has been lost, but revel in what is to come – looking forward (not to a future of gloom and decline), but to a future full of hope.
- The growth and stability of our parish school – the dedication of our school & CCD teachers in bringing the faith and Catholic witness to our young
- Our religious sisters to witness to Christ simply by their lives
- The participation of SO many in events like today’s “More than an Auction”



- The plans which are unfolding for a new parish center with social hall, office and priest residence (you'll be hearing a lot more about this VERY soon)
- ✍ Our constant outreach to others
  - Our weekly tithes which help change the lives of so many others, whether through our parish St. Vincent dePaul Society or our financial gifts to other charities which aid Catholics in the Holy Land and mission countries, which provide essential services to those who are in need
- ✍ Personally, I find the Knights of the Holy Temple, our young men and our women who are involved in liturgy, our high school EMHC's and servers, to be great signs of hope in God. Our Catholic youth are a GREAT sign of trust and hope in God!
- ✍ We are SO blessed – we have EVERY REASON for hope! Just look around!
- ✍ Now, what we need is to do what St. Peter told us in the first reading:



We have heard and believed in Christ's promises – we have found reasons for our hope! We've experience God's presence and His faithfulness in our own lives and parish. We have the Eucharist, the Mass, the Sacraments, the guidance of our Pope and bishop. Yes, we have crosses in our lives – but we have great reason for HOPE!

“Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you

for a reason for your hope!” Are you ready? Are you ready to share with others the reason for your Hope? The answer is: Christ. So many are *searching* for someone and something they can trust, someone who can give them meaning and purpose in their lives. Christ is the reason for our hope! Are you ready to share with others your reasons to have hope?