

Hope

Lent begins with hope. We start with Jesus, hope's foundation. We can bear the mark, a little cross on the forehead, because He has gone before us and made a way for us to walk. His Cross blazes our trail and gives us hope to walk further and more fully into His best for our lives. May these days of Lent clarify that hope and quicken our step toward all that Jesus wills for us!

Hope is a virtue, one of seven I will be focusing on as we walk together this Lent. In the words of Josef Pieper, a virtue 'is the most a man can be.' (All my references here are contained in his sublime 'On Hope', Ignatius Press.) Becoming virtuous unites us with our true selves (human nature as God designed it) and prepares us for eternity with Him.

I say 'becoming virtuous' because we integrate these qualities over the course of a lifetime. Gird up people; this is one long 'cross-walk'! Hope lights the way. Radiant Jesus grants us a well-lit trail but also goes before us and is never quite within our grasp. I love that! He keeps us reaching. Jesus longs to fulfill our hope. But that fulfillment comes only when we behold Him face-to-face. Then it disappears. Hope ceases to be when it is realized in full spousal union with Him.

In the meantime, we take seriously St. Paul's words. 'I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. I have not yet taken hold of it. One thing I do: forgetting what is behind, straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal...' (Phil. 3: 13, 14) That goal involves all that God has for us and wants to accomplish through us. Hope frees us to aspire to more! Alleluia!

Hope invites us to repent quickly of the heaviness that rests upon us like silt in a polluted world and tempts us to settle for the status quo. 'No Lord! There must be more that I have yet to grasp about Your good and perfect will for my life!' Hope stirs up a robust expectancy for the marvels our Father has in store for us.

And hope grants us the humility to recognize that we have not yet taken hold of all the marvels. Our vision is still impaired, our healing not yet complete, the gifts we are remain chipped masterpieces that cut others and can still collapse if we don't stay fixed on Jesus. I love that most about Pieper. His understanding of hope guides us on the narrow way between presumption and despair.

This Lent, I am sobered by the hard truth that unless we stay on hope's track, we can lose everything. We all know good men and women who have lost the Way and who are taking others with them. We have never faced such a powerful pull to craft our own identity and sexual fulfillment apart from Jesus. May I ask you to join me this Lent in praying for a godly fear based on the truth that we too could be lost to illusion? May the searchlight of hope reveal every little comfort that dulls our hope in Jesus. May this Lent grant us sacred space to 'let go' of sin so we might 'take up' more of Him and His glorious will for our lives.