

# G R I S T

Diocese of New Ulm      Social Concerns Office      April, 2009

from } **ON CHRISTIAN HOPE**

Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XVI, 11/30/07

[www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20071130\\_spe-salvi\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi_en.html)

The Christian message was not only “informative” but “performative” That means: the Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known – it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing...The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life. #2

To come to know God – the true God – means to receive hope. #3

Christianity did not bring a message of social revolution... Jesus, who himself died on the Cross, brought something totally different: an encounter with the Lord of all lords, an encounter with the living God and thus an encounter with a hope...that transformed life and the world from within. #4

Christ tells us who man truly is and what a man must do in order to be truly human. He shows us the way, and this way is the truth. He himself is both the way and the truth, and therefore he is also the life which all of us are seeking. #6

Faith is not merely a personal reaching out towards things to come that are still totally absent: it gives us something. It gives us even now something of the reality we are waiting for, and this present reality constitutes for us a “proof” of the things that are still unseen. Faith draws the future into the present, so that it is no longer simply a “not yet.” The fact that this future exists changes the present; the present is touched by the future reality, and thus the things of the future spill over into those of the present and those of the present into those of the future. #7

Salvation has always been considered a “social” reality... Sin is understood by the Fathers as the destruction of the unity of the human race, as fragmentation and division... “Redemption” appears as the reestablishment of unity, in which we come together once more in a union that begins to take shape in the world community of believers. #14

While this community-oriented vision of the “blessed life” is certainly directed beyond the present world, as such it also has to do with the building up of this world – in very different ways, according to the historical context and the possibilities offered or excluded thereby. #15

Without doubt, progress offers new possibilities for good, but it also opens up appalling possibilities for evil – possibilities that formerly did not exist. We have all witnessed the way in which progress, in the wrong hands, can become and has indeed become a terrifying progress in evil. If technical progress is not matched by corresponding progress in man’s ethical formation, in man’s inner growth, then it is not progress at all, but a threat for man and for the world. #22

Man needs God, otherwise he remains without hope... Reason and faith need one another in order to fulfill their true nature and their mission. #23

The right state of human affairs, the moral well-being of the world can never be guaranteed simply through structures alone, however good they are. Such structures are not only important, but necessary; yet they cannot and must not marginalize human freedom. Even the best structures function only when the community is animated by convictions capable of motivating people to assent freely to the social order...The kingdom of good will never be definitively established in this world. Anyone who promises the better world that is guaranteed to last for ever is making a false promise; he is overlooking human freedom. Freedom must constantly be won over for the cause of good. #24

This is what it means to say: Jesus Christ has “redeemed” us. Through him we have become certain of God, a God who is not a remote “first cause” of the world, because his only-begotten Son has become man and of him everyone can say: “I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” #26

Our relationship with God is established through communion with Jesus – we cannot achieve it alone or from our own resources alone. The relationship with Jesus, however, is a relationship with the one who gave himself as a ransom for all. Being in communion with Jesus Christ draws us into his “being for all”; it makes it our own way of being. He commits us to live for others, but only through communion with him does it become possible truly to be there for others, for the whole...Love of God leads to participation in the justice and generosity of God towards others. #28

While we must always be committed to the improvement of the world, tomorrow’s better world cannot be the proper and sufficient content of our hope. #30

We need the greater and lesser hopes that keep us going day by day. But these are not enough without the great

hope, which must surpass everything else. This great hope can only be God, who encompasses the whole of reality and who can bestow upon us what we, by ourselves, cannot attain. The fact that it comes to us as a gift is actually part of hope. #31

A first essential setting for learning hope is prayer. #32

All serious and upright human conduct is hope in action. #35

Like action, suffering is a part of our human existence. Suffering stems partly from our finitude, and partly from the mass of sin which has accumulated over the course of history, and continues to grow unabated today. Certainly we must do whatever we can to reduce suffering: to avoid as far as possible the suffering of the innocent; to soothe pain; to give assistance in overcoming mental suffering. These are obligations both in justice and in love, and they are included among the fundamental requirements of the Christian life and every truly human life. #36

We can try to limit suffering, to fight against it, but we cannot eliminate it. It is when we attempt to avoid suffering by withdrawing from anything that might involve hurt, when we try to spare ourselves the effort and pain of pursuing truth, love, and goodness, that we drift into a life of emptiness, in which there may be almost no pain, but the dark sensation of meaninglessness and abandonment is all the greater. #37

A society unable to accept its suffering members and incapable of helping to share their suffering and to bear it inwardly through “com-*passion*” is a cruel and inhuman society...To accept the “other” who suffers, means that I take up his suffering in such a way that it becomes mine also...The Latin word *con-solatio*, “consolation,” expresses this beautifully. It suggests *being with* the other in his solitude, so that it ceases to be solitude. Furthermore, the capacity to accept suffering for the sake of goodness, truth and justice is an essential criterion of humanity, because if my own well-being and safety are ultimately more important than truth and justice, then the power of the stronger prevails, then violence and untruth reign supreme. Truth and justice must stand above my comfort and physical well-being, or else my life itself becomes a lie. #38

To suffer with the other and for others; to suffer for the sake of truth and justice; to suffer out of love and in order to become a person who truly loves – these are fundamental elements of humanity...The Christian faith has shown us that truth, justice and love are not simply ideals, but enormously weighty realities. It has shown us that God – Truth and Love in person – desired to suffer for us and with us. Bernard of Clairvaux coined the marvelous expression: *Impassibilis est Deus, sed non incompassibilis* – God cannot suffer, but he can *suffer with*. Man is worth so much to God that he himself became man in order to *suffer with* man in an utterly real way – in flesh and blood – as is revealed to us in the

account of Jesus’ Passion. Hence in all human suffering we are joined by one who experiences and carries that suffering *with us*; hence *consolatio* is present in all suffering, the consolation of God’s compassionate love. #39

Evildoers, in the end, do not sit at table at the eternal banquet beside their victims without distinction, as though nothing had happened. #44

With death, our life-choice becomes definitive – our life stands before the judge. Our choice, which in the course of an entire life takes on a certain shape, can have a variety of forms. There can be people who have totally destroyed their desire for truth and readiness to love, people for whom everything has become a lie, people who have lived for hatred and have suppressed all love within themselves. This is a terrifying thought, but alarming profiles of this type can be seen in certain figures of our own history. In such people all would be beyond remedy and the destruction of good would be irrevocable: this is what we mean by the word *Hell*. On the other hand there can be people who are utterly pure, completely permeated by God, and thus fully open to their neighbors – people for whom communion with God even now gives direction to their entire being and whose journey towards God only brings to fulfillment what they already are. #45

For the great majority of people – we may suppose – there remains in the depths of their being an ultimate interior openness to truth, to love, to God. In the concrete choices of life, however, it is covered over by ever new compromises with evil – much filth covers purity, but the thirst for purity remains and it still constantly re-emerges from all that is base and remains present in the soul. #46

The way we live our lives is not immaterial, but our defilement does not stain us for ever if we have at least continued to reach out towards Christ, towards truth and towards love. #47

The souls of the departed can receive “solace and refreshment” through the Eucharist, prayer and almsgiving. The belief that love can reach into the afterlife, that reciprocal giving and receiving is possible, in which our affection for one another continues beyond the limits of death – this has been a fundamental conviction of Christianity throughout the ages and it remains a source of comfort today...No man is an island, entire of itself. Our lives are involved with one another, through innumerable interactions they are linked together. No one lives alone. No one sins alone. No one is saved alone. The lives of others continually spill over into mine: in what I think, say, do and achieve. And conversely, my life spills over into that of others: for better and for worse. So my prayer for another is not something extraneous to that person, something external, not even after death. In the interconnectedness of Being, my gratitude to the other – my prayer for him – can play a small part in his purification...Our hope is always essentially also hope for others; only thus is it truly hope for me too. #48