

Begin the Season with Hope

Welcome to Advent!!!! Advent is by far my favourite time of year. I love everything about it, the songs, the smells and the messages of hope, love, joy and peace. We are preparing ourselves for the birth of our saviour! It is a beautiful time of year.

Hope is this week's topic, and I can admit, I struggled to write this intro and accompanying challenge more so than with any of the other weeks. I believe that this is because hope is so very important. Hope is required if we are to love, find joy and have peace this advent season. Maybe it is because (as Father Mike mentions in his talk) I often confuse hope with optimism. I believe that to be hopeful I need to always look on the bright side of life.

Throughout history there are many, at first glance, hopeless times. Times when the world had to be over because (as Sam in the Lord of the Rings says) how could things ever be good again? But there are countless moments of hope in those times as well; times of hope and love, and friendship and standing up for what is right. There is light in even the darkest of tales. If we can't see it then we just haven't gotten to that part yet. It will come. God will reveal Himself.

Politicians are constantly lobbying for your hope; they will solve your problems. Journalists are demanding your faith; if there is a story you should know about out there they will tell the world, and their "truth" will set us free. The new Covid vaccine is coming out and apparently it will solve all of our problems and life will go back to what it was. For so many though, Covid 19 is not their biggest problem. Despair has enveloped our world and people in overwhelming numbers are succumbing to hopelessness. The world needs Jesus desperately and instead of accepting His wonderful gifts, many search out other places to put their hopes but they will never find peace and their souls will never be free from fear until they are able to accept what Jesus is offering; pure and perfect salvation.

When we live through extraordinary times, there is no going back to the way things were. Our circumstances change us yes, but so does our response to those circumstances. You do not need to be optimistic to have hope. It is nice, but not the same thing. You *do* need to have the ability to turn your circumstances over to God and have faith that even if you don't feel like you can handle any more, He's got this. There is purpose in our circumstances even if it is hidden from our eyes and even though bad things have happened, God is truly great, he is in control and he will not abandon or forsake his children. Our circumstances going into this advent may not be what we would chose, but God has purpose for us and He will not abandon us.

Where there is hope, fear will find no rest. And it is when we suffer and are afraid that we need hope the most. "...rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit..." (Romans 5:3-5)

Hold onto hope in the coming days of Advent, but also as we begin what may be a very difficult winter for us all. Do not become discouraged by numbers, and restrictions, and news articles, but turn your face to the Lord. Offer up your suffering to Him and have hope that God has a plan that is bigger than any of us. God is faithful to his children and will not forsake nor abandon us. It is only by accepting and preserving hope that we can accept the other gifts of love, joy, and peace that are offered to us throughout this season. Hope is a powerful thing. If you do not have hope to hold onto, then pray for hope and reach out to someone.

Your challenge this week is to search your soul and find the areas where hope is thin; the places where insecurities and doubt are allowed to linger. Offer these areas of your life up to God and pray for hope to strengthen our hearts against despair. Then share your Christian hope with others.

Children's Challenge:

Do you have any fears or anxieties troubling you as we begin this advent season? If so bring them to a parent or trusted friend and talk about them. Then pray for God to fill you with hope and conviction.

Prayer for the Week:

A Prayer for Hope

Heavenly father, I am your humble servant,
I come before you today in need of hope.
There are times when I feel helpless,
There are times when I feel weak.
I pray for hope.
I need hope for a better future.
I need hope for a better life.
I need hope for love and kindness.
Some say that the sky is at it's
darkest just before the light.
I pray that this is true, for all seems dark.
I need your light, Lord, in every way.
I pray to be filled with your light from
head to toe. To bask in your glory.
To know that all is right in the world,
as you have planned, and as you want
it to be.
Help me to walk in your light, and live
my life in faith and glory.
In your name I pray, Amen.

<https://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=2986>

Readings:

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. 1 Peter 5:10

We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 1:3

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, Ephesians 1:18

but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40:31

“Everything is possible for one who believes.” Mark 9:23

But God will never forget the needy; the hope of the afflicted will never perish. Psalm 9:18

May your unfailing love be with us, LORD, even as we put our hope in you. Psalm 33:22

For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? Romans 8:24

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

Songs of the Week: O Holy Night, O Come O Come Emmanuel, I lift My Eyes Up

Video Lectures:

<https://media.ascensionpress.com/video/what-is-hope-and-why-do-you-need-it/> -Father Mike (5:07 min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pp4TpuNz4fw> Video compilation of Pope Francis' words on hope (5:31 min)

Please consider checking out Brother Francis Days of Advent program on Formed for your children to enjoy throughout Advent. You may obtain a membership through FFI.

(<https://famfi.ca/>) FFI has outstanding resources for the whole family.

Hope In Action

I have sung the hymn It is Well with My Soul maybe a hundred times never having heard the courageous tale of the man who wrote it or the tragedies that his family endured. The link below is of a beautiful narration that brings this tale to life perfectly. Clearly preformed before Covid restrictions, it is wonderful to hear the voices of so many come together as one to bring justice to this beautiful story of hope and strength. **Some young children may find the content of the story distressing. Please consider telling them the story of David and Goliath instead, highlighting the point that David was the hope of his nation when all other warriors hid in fear but that God delivered David and his nation because David placed his hope in God.**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReApJymYSiw> It is Well with My Soul - Hugh Bonneville Christmas Concert Narration.

Object Lesson for the Little Ones

Use this activity to help your children recognize the hope they have when they trust God to guide them.

Using books or pieces of cardboard, create a “steppingstone” path from one side of your living room to the other. Add small challenges along the way, perhaps a chair to climb over or narrow “balance beams” made of masking tape. As you work, talk about the obstacles we face in life: moving to a different school, making new friends, being sick.

Now place a blindfold over your child’s eyes. Explain that often we can’t see how to get through the obstacles in our lives. We may say that we “hope” to find our way through, but what are our chances?

Take your child’s hand and guide him along each step of the path, explaining that we can face the challenges of life because we know that God is with us. Even if we can’t always see where we’re headed, our hope comes from knowing that God directs our steps.

—Heather Shaw



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