



## **Pilgrims of Hope – Poets to Guide Us along the Way in the 2025 Jubilee –**

**Robert P. Maloney, C.M.**

The CM Province of Eastern, USA

[maloney1939@hotmail.com](mailto:maloney1939@hotmail.com)

### ***Abstract:***

This article explores the theme of hope in the context of the 2025 Jubilee, drawing from the Vincentian tradition and poetry. Hope, a central theological virtue, was emphasized by St. Vincent de Paul, who often linked it with trust in Divine Providence. He urged his followers to abandon themselves to God's will, seeing hope as a source of strength and resilience. Louise de Marillac also highlighted hope in her spiritual legacy. The article then introduces three poems that illuminate hope's role in faith: Charles Péguy's *Portico of the Mystery of Hope*, Thomas Hardy's *The Darkling Thrush*, and Emily Dickinson's *Hope is the Thing with Feathers*. These works offer poetic reflections on hope's quiet but transformative power. As we journey through the Jubilee, Vincentian teachings and poetry serve as guides, reminding us that hope sustains faith and love, leading us toward renewal and trust in God's providence.

Cet article explore le thème de l'espoir dans la perspective du Jubilé de 2025, s'inspirant de la tradition vincentienne et de la poésie. Hope, a central theological virtue, was emphasized by St. Vincent de Paul, who often linked it with trust in Divine Providence. Il a encouragé ses disciples à abandonner leur volonté à celle de Dieu, voyant en l'espoir une source de force et de résilience. Louise de Marillac également mis l'accent sur l'espoir dans son héritage spirituel. The article then introduces three poems that illuminate hope's role in faith: Charles Péguy's *Portico of the Mystery of Hope*, Thomas Hardy's *The Darkling Thrush*, and Emily Dickinson's *Hope is the Thing with Feathers*. Ces œuvres offrent des réflexions poétiques sur le pouvoir transformateur mais discret de l'espoir. As we journey through the Jubilee, Vincentian teachings and poetry serve as guides, reminding us that hope sustains faith and love, leading us toward renewal and trust in God's providence.

Este artículo explora el tema de la esperanza en el contexto del Jubileo de 2025, tomando como referencia la tradición vincentiana y la poesía. La esperanza, una virtud teológica central, fue destacada por san Vicente de Paúl, quien a menudo la relacionó con la confianza en la providencia divina. Él instó a sus seguidores a abandonarse a la voluntad de Dios, considerando la esperanza como una fuente de fuerza y resiliencia. Louise de Marillac también destacó la importancia de la esperanza en su legado espiritual. A continuación, el artículo presenta tres poemas que iluminan la importancia de la esperanza en la fe: Charles Péguy, con *El porche del misterio de la esperanza*; Thomas Hardy, con *El tordo oscuro*, y Emily Dickinson, con *Hope is the thing with feathers*. Estas obras ofrecen una reflexión poética sobre la poderosa pero transformadora fuerza de la esperanza. A lo largo del Jubileo, las enseñanzas vincentianas y la poesía sirven de guía, recordándonos que la esperanza sustenta la fe y el amor, y nos conduce hacia la renovación y la confianza en la providencia de Dios.

**Keywords:** Hope, Jubilee, Poems, Vincent de Paul



Years ago, as I was finishing lunch at our Vincentian Motherhouse in Paris, a confrere tapped me on the shoulder and said, “I heard that you like Charles Péguy. Here’s a little gift.” He handed me the French poet’s “Portico of the Mystery of Hope.” The gift was not only unexpected; it was wonderful too! I have loved Péguy since high school, when a creative teacher introduced me to one of his poems.<sup>1</sup>

The Jubilee Year is upon us. Pope Francis has chosen as its motto “Pilgrims of Hope.” It is a theme with deep biblical roots, one that Vincent de Paul returned to again and again. It is also a theme that has fascinated poets and inspired some of their finest works.

Hope holds a prominent place in our Vincentian Family’s heritage.

Vincent himself spoke and wrote about it often, as I will describe below. At times, using lyrical terms, he marveled at how intense the hope of good people could be, “as when in the night one sees a tremendous brightness and feels intense heat” or “as the flame of a huge, well-lit fire grows when it is fanned by the wind.”<sup>2</sup>

Louise de Marillac’s last will and testament highlighted hope too, stating quite touchingly: “As to the place of my burial, I leave it entirely, under the disposition of divine providence, to the care of Monsieur Vincent, whom I beg to remember the great desire I have testified to be buried alongside the wall at the foot of the church of Saint-Lazare, in the little court which, from bones found there, appears to have been once a cemetery. I still greatly desire to be buried there, and I ask it of his charity for the love of God. I also ask that there be placed as soon as possible against the wall in the same place a large wooden cross with crucifix attached, and an inscription at its foot bearing this title: ‘Spes Unica’ (*Only Hope*). The whole to be at the expense of the little I leave and which God has given me to dispose in this my will.”<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> How vividly I recall the excerpt from Péguy’s “Portico” that my teacher asked us to memorize:

I don't like the man who doesn't sleep, says God.  
Sleep is the friend of man.  
Sleep is the friend of God.  
Sleep may be my most beautiful creation.  
And I too rested on the seventh day.

<sup>2</sup> CCD:II:383. CCD refers to *Correspondence, Conferences, Documents* edited by Pierre Coste, translated into English by: Helen Marie Law, D.C. (Vol. 1), Marie Poole, D.C. (Vol. 1-13b), James King, C.M. (Vol. 1-2), Francis Germovnik, C.M. (Vol. 1-8, 13a-13b [Latin]), Esther Cavanagh, D.C. (Vol. 2), Ann Mary Dougherty, D.C. (Vol. 12); Evelyne Franc, D.C. (Vol. 13a-13b), Thomas Davitt, C.M. (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Glennon E. Figge, C.M. (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), John G. Nugent, C.M. (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Andrew Spellman, C.M. (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]); edited: Jacqueline Kilar, D.C. (Vol. 1-2), Marie Poole, D.C. (Vol. 2-13b), Julia Denton, D.C. [editor-in-chief] (Vol. 3-10, 13a-13b), Paule Freeburg, D.C. (Vol. 3), Marian Hamwey, D.C. (Vol. 3), Elinor Hartman, D.C. (Vol. 4-10, 13a-13b), Ellen Van Zandt, D.C. (Vol. 9-13b), Ann Mary Dougherty, D.C. (Vol. 11-12); annotated by: John W. Carven, C.M. (Vol. 1-13b); New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014. To this, one must add the numerous unpublished letters, conferences, and documents that Fr. John Rybolt has recently made available online at [Saint Vincent de Paul / Correspondence, Conferences, Documents \(English translation\) | Correspondence, Conferences, and Documents of St. Vincent de Paul | DePaul University](https://www.saintvincentdepaul.org/correspondence)

<sup>3</sup> McNeil, Betty Ann D.C. (1994) "Last Will and Testament of Saint Louise de Marillac," *Vincentian Heritage Journal*: Vol. 15: Iss. 2, Article 1, p. 108.. Available at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj/vol15/iss2/1> On occasion, to fit the context. I have modified the translation slightly to fit the context and to correspond to the standards of contemporary English punctuation.

In a similar spirit, the international Society of St. Vincent de Paul has chosen hope as its motto: “*Serviens in Spe*” (Serving in Hope).

This article will focus on I) what St. Vincent taught about hope, II) some poems about hope to nourish us on our Jubilee journey, III) renewing our hope as we celebrate this year.

## **I. St. Vincent and Hope**

A digital search of the fourteen volumes of Vincent’s works results in more than two thousand hits if you include “trust,” which Vincent said was “almost the same thing.”<sup>4</sup> This high count is deceptive, however, since the word “hope” is commonly used in a non-theological sense to express desires or wishes (“I hope to see you tomorrow” or “I hope the bakery is still open!”), but such expressions have little to do with the topic at hand. Below, I will organize Vincent’s teaching under two headings: 1) Hope as a theological virtue, and 2) Trust in Divine Providence. Even this division is somewhat artificial, since Vincent often uses “hope” and “trust” interchangeably.

### *1) Hope as a Theological Virtue*

Vincent addressed the topic at length on June 9, 1658, when he told the Daughters: “Hope, Sisters, engenders confidence. It is a theological virtue by which we trust that God will give us the graces necessary to attain eternal life. And this virtue of hope, you see, must be faith-filled. We have to believe unhesitatingly that God will grant us the grace to reach heaven, provided we use the means He gives us. We’re obliged to believe this and that God wants to give us all the graces necessary for our salvation ... We have only to abandon ourselves to His guidance ...”<sup>5</sup>

In 1643, encouraging the Daughters of Charity to live simply, he told them that they were truly rich since God was their all. He stated: “Trust God, dear Sisters. Has anyone ever heard that those who trust in God’s promises have been deceived? That has never been seen and never will be. Yes, Sisters, God is faithful to His promises and trusting in Him is a very good thing. Furthermore, this confidence is the entire wealth of the Daughters of Charity and their guarantee. How happy you’ll be, Sisters, if you never lack this confidence, for then you’ll be true Daughters of Charity.”<sup>6</sup>

At the end of a Repetition of Prayer with his priests and brothers on November 25, 1657, Vincent cried out: “Oh, how good it is to hope in God and put our trust in Him!”<sup>7</sup> He often returned to this theme when speaking about how hope-filled the missionaries who set off for Madagascar had been.

On May 18, 1659, he told Louis Rivet, the Superior in Saintes: “May God, in His mercy, be pleased to fill all of us with faith, charity, and zeal for rendering some small service to His Church! Happy are those who, on these foundations, hope in God and consume themselves for charity!”<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> CCD:X:403.

<sup>5</sup> CCD:X:403-404.

<sup>6</sup> CCD:IX:74..

<sup>7</sup> CCD:XI:392.

<sup>8</sup> CCD:VII:575.

## 2) *Trust in Divine Providence*

I have written about this topic elsewhere at length. Here, let me summarize Vincent's teaching briefly.<sup>9</sup>

Vincent urged his followers repeatedly to abandon themselves to God's Providence. His teaching on providence rested on two foundation-stones: a) deep confidence in God's love; b) "indifference," that is, detachment from anything that impedes us from "willing only what He wills."<sup>10</sup>

### a) **confidence in God's love**

Trust in providence is the ability to place oneself in the hands of God as a loving Father or Mother.<sup>11</sup>

"Let us give ourselves to God," St. Vincent said repeatedly to the Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity.<sup>12</sup> The journal written by Jean Gicquel recounts how Vincent told Frs. Alméras, Berthe, and Gicquel, on June 7, 1660, just four months before his death: "To wear oneself out for God, to have happiness and strength only to consume them for God, is to do what Our Lord Himself did, who exhausted Himself for love of His Father."<sup>13</sup>

Vincent wanted love for God to be all-embracing. He wrote to Pierre Escart: "... I greatly hope we may set about stripping ourselves entirely of affection for anything that is not God, be attached to things only for God and according to God, and that we may seek and establish His kingdom first of all in ourselves, and then in others. That is what I entreat you to ask of Him for me..."<sup>14</sup>

Vincent was profoundly convinced that, because God loves us deeply, he exercises a continual providence in our lives. He told the Daughters: "To have confidence in Providence means that we must hope that God will take care of those who serve Him, as a husband takes care of his wife and a father his child. That's how-and even more so-God takes care of us. We have only to abandon ourselves to His guidance, as the Rule says, *as an infant does to its wet nurse*.<sup>15</sup> If she puts the baby on her right arm, the child is quite content; if she moves him to the left one, he doesn't care; as long as he has her breast, he's satisfied. We must, then, have the same confidence in Divine Providence, since God takes care of all that concerns us, just as a nursing mother takes care of her baby."<sup>16</sup>

Speaking of the providence which Jesus himself has for his followers, Vincent

---

<sup>9</sup> I have written about this topic at length. Cf. "Providence Revisited," *Vincentiana* 6 (1993), 594-616, and *He Hears the Cry of the Poor* (New York: New City Press, 1995) 52-72.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. SV V, 403: "...sans la tranquillité de l'esprit il est difficile de réussir dans aucun exercice, mais, comme elle dépend principalement de Dieu et de notre indifférence, il faut aussi établir ces deux principes en nous et la chercher dans ces deux sources."

<sup>11</sup> Vincent often referred to God as a Mother. Cf. CCD:VI:463; VIII:64; VIII:324; IX:107.

<sup>12</sup> CCD:V:324; VII:610; X:496.

<sup>13</sup> CCD:XIIIa:195.

<sup>14</sup> CCD:II:122.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. CCD:X:403. Vincent used this analogy on several occasions.

<sup>16</sup> CCD:X:403-404.

told Jean Martin in 1647: "So, Father, let us ask Our Lord that all things may be done in accord with His Providence, and that our wills may be so submissive to Him that between Him and us there may be only one will, causing us to enjoy His unrivaled love in time and in eternity."<sup>17</sup> One notes here the strong influence of Benedict of Canfield's *Rule of Perfection*, with its emphasis on doing the will of God, had on Vincent.<sup>18</sup>

## b) indifference<sup>19</sup>

Indifference, for Vincent, is detachment from all things that keep us from God.<sup>20</sup> It sets us free to be united with him,<sup>21</sup> disposing us to will only what God wills.<sup>22</sup> It is closely linked with trust in providence. He told Louise de Marillac that "Our Lord is a continual Communion for those who are united to what He wills and does not will."<sup>23</sup> He gave her this advice again and again: "You must accept God's guidance of your Daughters, offer them to Him, and remain at peace. From all eternity, the Son of God saw His companions dispersed and almost scattered. You must unite your will to His."<sup>24</sup>

He spoke lyrically to the Daughters of Charity on the theme. "To do Will of God is to begin our paradise in this world. Give me a person, give me a Sister, who does God's Will all her life; she begins her paradise here on earth, for she has no other will than the Will of God, and that is sharing in the happiness of the blessed."<sup>25</sup>

## II. Some poems to nourish us on our Jubilee journey

Recently, Pope Francis reminded us of how important poetry is at all stages in our formation, both initial and ongoing.<sup>26</sup> Below, I will highlight three striking "hope poems": 1) Charles Péguy's "Portico," 2) Thomas Hardy's "The Darkling Thrush," and 3) Emily Dickinson's "Hope is the Thing with Feathers." For those interested in exploring the topic further, I will mention numerous others. I am sure that readers of other languages and cultures can easily enrich my list.

### 1) Charles Péguy's "Portico of the Mystery of Hope"

From beginning to end, Péguy's life was marked by war. His father died of combat wounds in 1874 when Charles was just a year old. He himself was killed in battle, shot in the forehead in the second month of World War I. His free-verse "Portico" became

---

<sup>17</sup> CCD:III:200.

<sup>18</sup> This English Capuchin, named William Fitch (1562-1611), having been converted from Puritanism, took refuge in France. He had enormous influence on his contemporaries and was a much sought-after spiritual director. Bremond states that his *Rule of Perfection* was the manual for two or three generations of mystics, calling him "the master of masters". Cf. *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France* (Paris, 1916 and 1928), II, 155-158, as well as VII, 266. Cf., also, T. Davitt, "An Introduction to Benet of Canfield," *Colloque* #16 (1987) 268-82.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Sung-Hae Kim, "Indifference as the Freedom of the Heart: The Spiritual Fruit of Apostolic Mysticism -- Christian, Confucian, and Daoist Cases," *Vincentian Heritage* 30 (2011), 27-46. Also, Robert Maloney, "The Freedom of the Children of God: Vincent de Paul's Image-Filled Teaching," in *A New Century Dawns* (St. Louis, MO: Society of St. Vincent de Paul, 2017), p. 146-163.

<sup>20</sup> CCD:XII:195.

<sup>21</sup> CCD:XII:188, 196.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission, II, 10.

<sup>23</sup> CCD:I:233.

<sup>24</sup> CCD:V:427-28.

<sup>25</sup> CCD:IX:506-507.

<sup>26</sup> July 17, 2024. Cf. [Letter of the Holy Father on the Role of Literature in Formation \(17 July 2024\) | Francis \(vatican.va\)](https://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/letters/2024/07/17-letter-of-the-holy-father-on-the-role-of-literature-in-formation-17-july-2024_fr.html)

enormously popular in France, running through more than sixty editions. It was a favorite book of Charles de Gaulle. Péguy describes hope as a “little sister” who walks between her “taller sisters,” faith and charity. Whenever the taller sisters grow tired, the little one instills them with new energy. Hope never lets faith grow weak or charity falter.<sup>27</sup> Using

---

<sup>27</sup> The longer original French reads:

La Foi est une Épouse fidèle.  
La Charité est une Mère.  
Une mère ardente, pleine de cœur.  
Ou une sœur aînée qui est comme une mère.  
L'Espérance est une petite fille de rien du tout.  
Qui est venue au monde le jour de Noël

La petite espérance s'avance entre ses deux grandes sœurs et on ne prend pas seulement garde à elle.

Sur le chemin du salut, sur le chemin charnel, sur le chemin raboteux du salut, sur la route interminable, sur la route entre ses deux sœurs la petite espérance  
S'avance.

Entre ses deux grandes sœurs.

Celle qui est mariée.

Et celle qui est mère.

Et l'on n'a d'attention, le peuple chrétien n'a d'attention que pour les deux grandes sœurs.

La première et la dernière.

Qui vont au plus pressé.

Au temps présent.

À l'instant momentané qui passe.

Le peuple chrétien ne voit que les deux grandes sœurs, n'a de regard que pour les deux grandes sœurs.

Celle qui est à droite et celle qui est à gauche.

Et il ne voit quasiment pas celle qui est au milieu.

La petite, celle qui va encore à l'école.

Et qui marche.

Perdue entre les jupes de ses sœurs.

Et il croit volontiers que ce sont les deux grandes qui traînent la petite par la main.

Au milieu.

Entre les deux.

Pour lui faire faire ce chemin raboteux du salut.

Les aveugles qui ne voient pas au contraire.

Que c'est elle au milieu qui entraîne ses grandes sœurs.

Et que sans elle elles ne seraient rien.

Que deux femmes déjà âgées.

Deux femmes d'un certain âge.

Fripées par la vie.

Sur le *chemin montant, sablonneux, malaisé.*

Sur la route montante.

Traînée, pendue aux bras de ses deux grandes sœurs,

Qui la tiennent pas la main,

La petite espérance.

S'avance.

simple language, light humor, and sometimes the prayerful rhythm of a litany, Péguy speaks of hope's playful confidence and unshakeable joy even in face of the mystery of human suffering.

Faith does not surprise me ...  
Charity, said God, does not surprise me ...  
What surprises me, said God, is hope.  
And I cannot get over it.  
This little hope who looks like a slip of a girl.  
This little girl hope.  
Immortal hope.  
Little hope moves forward between her two big sisters and is not even noticed.  
Christian people see only the two big sisters, pay attention only to the two big sisters.  
The one on the right and the one on the left.  
And they practically do not see the one in the middle.  
The little one, who still goes to school.  
And who walks.  
Hidden in the skirts of her sisters.  
And they willingly believe that it is the two big sisters who are pulling the little one along by the hand.  
In the middle.  
Between the two of them.  
To make her walk this rough road to salvation.  
They are blind not to see on the contrary.  
That it is the one in the middle who is pulling her sisters.  
It is she the little one who pulls the whole weight.  
For faith sees only what is.  
But she, she alone, sees what will be.  
Charity loves only what is.  
But she, she alone, loves what will be.  
On the sandy, toilsome, uphill road.  
The uphill way.  
Pulling, dragging on the arms of her two big sisters.  
Who hold her by the hand,  
Little hope  
Moves forward.

For Péguy, hope is paramount among the theological virtues.

---

Et au milieu entre ses deux grandes sœurs elle a l'air de se laisser traîner.  
Comme un enfant qui n'aurait pas la force de marcher.  
Et qu'on traînerait sur cette route malgré elle.  
Et en réalité c'est elle qui fait marcher les deux autres.  
Et qui les traîne.  
Et qui fait marcher tout le monde.  
Et qui le traîne.  
Car on ne travaille jamais que pour les enfants.

Et les deux grandes ne marchent que pour la petite.

2) *Thomas Hardy's "The Darkling Thrush"*

Thomas Hardy's life and poetry, like Péguy's, were deeply influenced by war, particularly the Boer War (1899-1902) and World War I (1914-18). The death of his wife Emma in 1912 also had a traumatic effect on him. While many of his poems expressed disappointment in life and in love, "The Darkling Thrush," one of his most popular works, written in 1900, broke through the gloom and sang of hope. Strangely, his poems were initially not nearly as well received as his novels,<sup>28</sup> but he is now recognized as one of the great poets of the 20th century.

The land's sharp features seemed to be  
The Century's corpse outleant,  
His crypt the cloudy canopy,  
The wind his death-lament.  
The ancient pulse of germ and birth  
Was shrunken hard and dry,  
And every spirit upon earth  
Seemed fervourless as I.  
At once a voice arose among  
The bleak twigs overhead  
In a full-hearted evensong  
Of joy illimited;  
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,  
In blast-beruffled plume,  
Had chosen thus to fling his soul  
Upon the growing gloom.  
So little cause for carolings  
Of such ecstatic sound  
Was written on terrestrial things  
Afar or nigh around,  
That I could think there trembled through  
His happy good-night air  
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew  
And I was unaware.

Songbirds have inspired some of the finest poets in the English language. These birds have also sown seeds wherever they have flown. Thrushes are very common in Great Britain and much loved for their music. In "The Darkling Thrush," Hardy describes how, leaning on a gate at twilight on December 31, 1900, he asked himself how this elderly thrush could be so assured of "some Blessed hope" when engulfed by wind, rain, and wintry desolation.

Few birds, in fact, convey a greater sense of optimism than a song thrush, whose repertoire comprises a series of repetitive phrases delivered with force. As the thrush's notes resound across the countryside, listeners, like Hardy, readily feel exhilarated by a sense of wellbeing.

---

<sup>28</sup> *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, and *Jude the Obscure* are highly regarded today. All have become major films.



One of the world's other most persistent singers is the nightingale, a small, plain brown bird with a reddish tail. It chants on and on with remarkable beauty and endurance. John Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" sings a song of hope similar to Hardy's:

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!  
No hungry generations tread thee down;  
The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
In ancient days by emperor and clown:  
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path  
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,  
She stood in tears amid the alien corn.

In Richard III, Shakespeare tells us: "True hope is swift, and flies with swallow's wings." "Hope springs eternal from the human breast," declares Alexander Pope in his "Essay on Man III." Maya Angelous muses: "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings."

Birds, songs, seeds, wings. More than two thousand years earlier than these poets, Plato, in "The Phaedrus," described how the winged soul soars. Flying higher and higher, it defies the laws of gravity that weigh us all down. From new heights, it sees beyond the daily boundaries that usually hem us in. It comprehends the unity of created reality. It penetrates to the depth of things, viewing them in a broader context that gives them new meaning. It loves with a love that is no longer restricted to one's own small world, but that transcends a particular time and space, and that is free. It reaches out toward universal beauty, goodness and wisdom, and seeks to recreate it. Plato concluded: *And, therefore, the mind of the reflective person alone has wings; and this is just, for he or she is always, according to the measure of their abilities, clinging in recollection to those things in which God abides, and, in beholding which, He is what He is. And someone who employs aright these memories is ever being initiated into perfect mysteries and alone becomes truly perfect.*<sup>29</sup>

3) *Emily Dickinson's "Hope is the Thing with Feathers"*

"Hope" is the thing with feathers  
That perches in the soul,  
And sings the tune without the words,  
And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the Gale is heard;  
And sore must be the storm  
That could abash the little bird  
That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chilliest land,  
And on the strangest sea;  
Yet, never, in extremity,  
It asked a crumb of me.

Different from Péguy and his free-verse style, Dickinson uses an iambic meter to engage the reader. Like Hardy, she employs the imagery of gales and storms. And like both authors, she plays with the metaphor of hope as a dauntless singing bird whose melodious song endures, despite the turbulence that attempts to silence it. She adds at the end that hope asks nothing of her in return!

---

<sup>29</sup> Plato's dialogue, "The Phaedrus," can be found online at: <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/phaedrus.html>

Some poets proclaim that hope and justice are allied. Seamus Heaney, in his “Doubletake” from *The Cure of Troy* penned the now-famous lines:

History says, Don't hope  
on this side of the grave.  
But then, once in a lifetime  
The longed for tidal wave  
Of justice can rise up,  
And hope and history rhyme.

Others describe how hope and wonder spark the imagination, so that we dream dreams that can really be achieved. The great German poet Rainer Maria Rilke rhapsodized:<sup>30</sup>

As once the winged energy of delight  
carried you over childhood's dark abysses,  
now beyond your own life build the great  
arch of unimagined bridges.

Wonders happen if we can succeed  
in passing through the harshest danger;  
but only in a bright and purely granted  
achievement can we realize the wonder.

During one of the Czech Republic's most difficult times, Václav Havel stated: “Either we have hope within us, or we don't. It is a dimension of the soul... Hope in this deep and powerful sense is the ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed... It is this hope, above all, that gives us the strength to live and continually to try new things, even in conditions that seem as hopeless as ours do here and now.”<sup>31</sup> That kind of hope is the feathered thing that perches in the soul.

### III. Reviving hope as we celebrate this Jubilee

How might we best celebrate this Year of Hope? Let me suggest the following:

---

<sup>30</sup> Rilke (1875 – 1926), “As once the winged energy of delight.” Cf. *Uncollected Poems*, selected and edited by Edward Snow (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996) 176-77.

Da dich das geflügelte Entzücken  
über manchen frühen Abgrund trug, baue jetzt der unerhörten  
Brücken kühn berechenbaren Bug.

Wunder ist nicht nur im unerklärten Überstehen der Gefahr;  
erst in einer klaren reingewährten Leistung wird das Wunder  
wunderbar.

Mitzuwirken ist nicht Überhebung  
an dem unbeschreiblichen Bezug, immer inniger wird die  
Verwebung, nur Getragensein ist nicht genug.

Deine ausgeübten Kräfte spanne,  
bis sie reichen, zwischen zweien Widersprüchen . . . Denn im Manne  
will der Gott beraten sein.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2016) 11.

## 1. Feasting on hope in the scriptures

The New Testament scriptures sing of hope continually: “Praised be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (Eph 1:3).

Paul describes how Abraham was willing to sacrifice his only son, “hoping against hope that he would become ‘the father of many nations,’ according to what was said, ‘Thus shall your descendants be’” (Rom 4:18). Paul continues: “Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom 5:5-6). In the same letter, he adds: “For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” (Rom 8:24-25). He concludes: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the holy Spirit” (Rom 15:13).

The author of Hebrews sees hope as an anchor that we cast into the Holy of Holies, the earthly image of God’s heavenly home. He urges us to “hold fast to the hope that lies before us. This we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and firm, which reaches into the interior behind the veil, where Jesus has entered on our behalf as forerunner” (Heb 6:18-20).

The author of 1 Peter states: “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope” (1 Peter 3:15).

Readers might meditate on many more citations:

- 1 Tim 1:1: “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our savior and of Christ Jesus our hope ...”
- 1 Thess 1:2-3: “We give thanks to God always for all of you, remembering you in our prayers, unceasingly, calling to mind your work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ ...”
- Col 1:27: “God chose to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; it is Christ in you, the hope for glory.”

## 2. Recognizing hope as the fundamental human drive of the human person, as the quest for purpose and meaning in life

How often at the Eucharist we proclaim that “we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.” In one of the commonly recited prefaces to the Eucharistic Prayer, we say: “With unwavering hope, we await his return in glory.” Is that really our fundamental stance in life?

In his encyclical “*Saved in Hope*,” Pope Benedict XVI wrote, “The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life.”<sup>32</sup> Theologians often describe hope as the fundamental Christian state of mind. Jürgen Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope* (1964), one of the ground-breaking works of the twentieth century, had a huge impact in theological circles and significantly influenced liberation

---

<sup>32</sup> Benedict XVI, “*Spe Salvi*” (November 30, 2007), paragraph 2.

theology. Moltmann stated that Christian theology must always be about the future that God promises to bring about. In a society where many were wedded to a sense of progress that assumed that all would be well if we worked better and harder, Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* overturned this assumption and urged Christians to set their sights on the future promises of God, which are often in radical discontinuity with the world as it is.<sup>33</sup>

We profess that we trust in the promise of eternal life. The Nicene Creed, so frequently recited or sung at the Sunday Eucharist, concludes firmly: "I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen."<sup>34</sup>

In Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the inscription on the gates of hell reads: "Abandon hope, all you who enter here."<sup>35</sup> Christian creeds offer us a more positive approach, as does Dante in the final part of his famous work:

But already my desire and my will  
were being turned like a wheel, all at one speed,  
by the Love which moves the sun and the other stars.<sup>36</sup>

Hope gives life meaning. A famous Latin axiom, playing on the change of a single vowel, states: "Dum spiro, spero" (As long as I breathe, I hope).

### 3. Trusting in Providence

I love the words that Vincent wrote to Jean Barreau on Dec. 4, 1648: "We cannot better assure our eternal happiness than by living and dying in the service of the poor, in the arms of Providence, and with genuine renouncement of ourselves in order to follow Jesus Christ."<sup>37</sup>

Vincent believed deeply that God had a hidden plan which works consistently for good. He wrote to Louise de Marillac in 1629: "Oh! what great hidden treasures there are in holy Providence and how marvelously Our Lord is honored by those who follow it and do not try to get ahead of it!"<sup>38</sup>

Trust in providence implies that there is an unseen wisdom which guides the events of history and can even reconcile opposites. On occasion, we get glimpses of a larger picture where tragedy works for good. Destructive floods may also provide fertile land for the future. Enormous fires ravage forests, doing huge damage, but they may also purify them for luxuriant growth in the future. Pain and suffering at times mature a person and help him or her to grow in compassion and understanding for others.

In a striking Greek myth, the infant Demophoön is placed in the care of the divine mother Demeter, who caresses him, nurses him, breathes on him, and anoints him with

---

<sup>33</sup> A fascinating, but difficult, essay by Karl Rahner approaches the question of how we speak about the future from a point of view that is very distinct from that of Moltmann. Cf. Karl Rahner, "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore, Md.: Helicon, 1966) 323-46.

<sup>34</sup> The Latin text reads: "Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum, et vitam venturi saeculi. Amen." The Latin verb "exspectare" means "await" or "look forward to" or "hope for." The original Greek verb used at Nicaea, προσδοκάω, has the same meaning.

<sup>35</sup> Inferno. Canto III, line 9: "Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate."

<sup>36</sup> Paradiso, Canto XXXIII, lines 142-145.

<sup>37</sup> CCD:III:384.

<sup>38</sup> CCD:I:60.

ambrosia. At night, she places him in a fire to make him immortal. When his human mother discovers this, she cries out in fear. But Demeter responds: “You don't know when fate is bringing you something good or something bad!” Demeter is giving a lesson in nursing. She shows that motherhood involves nurturing not only in human ways but also in divine ways. Holding the child in the fire is a way of burning away those elements that resist immortality.<sup>39</sup>

The “hidden plan” of God is a theme that St. Paul returns to frequently. It is revealed in Christ, who brings together death and life, but its fullness is revealed only in the end-time when all things are subjected to Christ<sup>40</sup> and through him to the Father.<sup>41</sup> “God has given us the wisdom to understand fully the mystery, the plan he was pleased to decree in Christ, to be carried out in the fullness of time: namely, to bring all things in the heavens and on earth into one under Christ's headship.”<sup>42</sup> The Pauline letters speak of “the mystery of Christ in you, your hope of glory,”<sup>43</sup> “the mystery of God --- namely Christ --- in whom every treasure of wisdom and knowledge is hidden.”<sup>44</sup>

But, as the texts themselves state, God's wisdom remains a mystery, “a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the gentiles.”<sup>45</sup> The mystery of the cross and resurrection of Jesus, the center of Christian hope and the symbol of God's providence, provides no explanation of the reconciliation of opposites. It calls us, rather, to say with Jesus: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”<sup>46</sup> The cross proclaims that the power of God overcomes human weakness, bringing life from death, and that the wisdom of God surpasses the limits of human reasoning, bringing light to the darkness.

#### 4. Waiting with patience and perseverance

More than half a century after his influential *Theology of Hope*, Jürgen Moltmann wrote an essay, *On Patience* (2018). It treated two aspects of that virtue, both of which we find in the biblical traditions: forbearance and endurance. Writing as a 92-year-old, Moltmann began the second paragraph of his essay autobiographically: “In my youth, I learned to know ‘the God of hope’ and loved the beginnings of a new life with new ideas. But in my old age I am learning to know ‘the God of patience’ and stay in my place in life.”<sup>47</sup>

Youth and old age, Moltmann went on to say, are not about chronology, but about our experience in life and our stance toward death. Hope and patience belong to both youth and old age; they complement each other. He continued:

*Without endurance, hope turns superficial and evaporates when it meets first resistances. In hope we start something new, but only endurance helps us persevere. Only tenacious endurance makes hope sustainable. We learn*

---

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992) 44.

<sup>40</sup> Eph 1:9.

<sup>41</sup> 1 Cor 15:28.

<sup>42</sup> Eph 1:9-10.

<sup>43</sup> Col 1:27.

<sup>44</sup> Col 2:2-3.

<sup>45</sup> 1 Cor 1:23.

<sup>46</sup> Lk 23:46.

<sup>47</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Über Geduld, Barmherzigkeit und Solidarität* (Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2018), p. 13.

*endurance only with the help of hope. On the other hand, when hope gets lost, endurance turns into passivity. Hope turns endurance into active passivity. In hope we affirm the pain that comes with endurance and learn to tolerate it.*<sup>48</sup>

In today's social context, where speed and immediacy are often in constant demand, how important it is to develop the ability to wait with confidence, recognizing how patient God is with us. When we intertwine hope and patience, we acknowledge that Christian life is a journey in search of meaning.

Vincent often emphasized good timing. He was utterly convinced that grace has its moments. Some of the works of Shakespeare, Vincent's contemporary, emphasized this same truth in poetic language. "There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all," states Hamlet.<sup>49</sup> In a more violent context, Brutus states in *Julius Caesar*: "There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and miseries. On such a full sea are we now afloat, and we must take the current when it serves, or lose our ventures."<sup>50</sup>

Trust in providence involves peaceful waiting, not in a passive sense, but with an active capacity for knowing the right moment to act. Sometimes the right moment comes quickly; at other times, it arrives slowly. Sometimes it arrives unexpectedly, with almost no preparation; at other times, it reveals itself only with considerable prodding. Vincent praised those who honored Providence by actively using the means that God placed at their disposal for accomplishing his goals.<sup>51</sup>

## 5. Joining the poor in hope

In our Vincentian tradition, hope and friendship with the poor are intimately linked. Vincent told his priests and brothers: "God loves the poor. Consequently, He loves those who love the poor. For, when we truly love someone, we have an affection for his friends and for his servants. Now, the Little Company of the Mission strives to devote itself ardently to serve persons who are poor, the well-beloved of God. In this way, we have good reason to hope that, for love of them, God will love us. Come then, my dear confreres, let us devote ourselves with renewed love to serve those who are poor, and even to seek out those who are the poorest and most abandoned."<sup>52</sup>

He told the Daughters: "They (the poor) must open heaven for you, for the poor have that advantage of opening heaven. And that's what Our Lord says, 'Make friends of your riches, so that they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles.'<sup>53</sup>

Before making hope the theme of the 2025 Jubilee, Pope Francis addressed the topic in his message for the third World Day of the Poor in 2019, which he entitled: "The hope of the poor shall not perish for ever" (Ps 9:19).<sup>54</sup> In the final paragraph of the

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>49</sup> *Hamlet* V.ii.229; cf. *King Lear* V.ii.10-12: "Ripeness is all."

<sup>50</sup> *Julius Caesar* IV.iii.217-223.

<sup>51</sup> CCD:V:400: "Let us wait patiently but let us act, and, so to speak, let us make haste slowly in the negotiation of one of the most important affairs the Congregation will ever have."

<sup>52</sup> CCD:XI:349.

<sup>53</sup> CCD:X:545.

<sup>54</sup> This message can be found at: [Third World Day of the Poor, 2019: The hope of the poor shall not perish for ever | Francis \(vatican.va\)](https://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francis/messages/short_messages/2019/03/20190319sm_1584828.html)

message, he stated: “The Lord does not abandon those who seek him and call upon his name: ‘He does not forget the cry of the poor’ (*Ps* 9:12), for his ears are attentive to their voice. The hope of the poor defies deadly situations, for the poor know that they are especially loved by God, and this is stronger than any suffering or exclusion. Poverty does not deprive them of their God-given dignity; they live in the certainty that it will be fully restored to them by God himself, who is not indifferent to the lot of his lowliest sons and daughters. On the contrary, he sees their struggles and sorrows, he takes them by the hand, and he gives them strength and courage (cf. *Ps* 10:14). The hope of the poor is confirmed in the certainty that their voice is heard by the Lord, that in him they will find true justice, that their hearts will be strengthened and continue to love (cf. *Ps* 10:17).”

He concluded that message by using the images of seeds and wings which the poets cited above so loved:

*If the disciples of the Lord Jesus wish to be genuine evangelizers, they must sow tangible seeds of hope. I ask all Christian communities, and all those who feel impelled to offer hope and consolation to the poor, to help ensure that this World Day of the Poor will encourage more and more people to cooperate effectively so that no one will feel deprived of closeness and solidarity. May you always treasure the words of the prophet who proclaims a different future: “For you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings” (Mal 3:20 [4:2]).*

## References:

- Benedict XVI. 2007. “Spe Salvi” (November 30, 2007), paragraph 2.
- Bremond, Henri. 1928. *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France* (Paris, 1916 and 1928), II, 155-158, as well as VII, 266. Cf.,
- Coste, Pierre. 1952. *The Life and Works of Saint Vincent de Paul*, translated by Joseph Leonard, C.M. (Newman Press: Westminster, Maryland, 1952), III, chapter LVIII.
- de Paul, Vincent. *Correspondence, Conference, Documents* (CCD) edited by Pierre Coste, translated into English by: Helen Marie Law, D.C. (Vol. 1), Marie Poole, D.C. (Vol. 1-13b), James King, C.M. (Vol. 1-2), Francis Germovnik, C.M. (Vol. 1-8, 13a-13b [Latin]), Esther Cavanagh, D.C. (Vol. 2), Ann Mary Dougherty, D.C. (Vol. 12); Evelynne Franc, D.C. (Vol. 13a-13b), Thomas Davitt, C.M. (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Glennon E. Figge, C.M. (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), John G. Nugent, C.M. (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Andrew Spellman, C.M. (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]); edited: Jacqueline Kilar, D.C. (Vol. 1-2), Marie Poole, D.C. (Vol. 2-13b), Julia Denton, D.C. [editor-in-chief] (Vol. 3-10, 13a-13b), Paule Freeburg, D.C. (Vol. 3), Mirian Hamway, D.C. (Vol. 3), Elinor Hartman, D.C. (Vol. 4-10, 13a-13b), Ellen Van Zandt, D.C. (Vol. 9-13b), Ann Mary Dougherty, D.C. (Vol. 11-12); annotated by: John W. Carven, C.M. (Vol. 1-13b); New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014. To this, one must add the numerous unpublished letters, conferences, and documents that Fr. John Rybolt has recently made available online at [Saint Vincent de Paul / Correspondence, Conferences, Documents](#)

Dickinson, Emily. 1983. *Hope is the Thing with Feathers*. Originally published 1891.

Francis, Pope. 2019. Third World Day of the Poor, 2019: The hope of the poor shall not perish for ever | Francis (vatican.va)

Francis, Pope. 2024. Letter of the Holy Father on the Role of Literature in Formation (17 July 2024) | Francis (vatican.va)

Hardy, Thomas. 1985. *The Darkling Thrush*. Originally published 1900

Kim, Sung-Hae. 2011. "Indifference as the Freedom of the Heart: The Spiritual Fruit of Apostolic Mysticism -- Christian, Confucian, and Daoist Cases," *Vincentian Heritage* 30 (2011), 27-46. Also,

Maloney, Robert P. 2017. The Freedom of the Children of God: Vincent de Paul's Image-Filled Teaching," in *A New Century Dawns* (St. Louis, MO: Society of St. Vincent de Paul, 2017), p.

Maloney, Robert P. 2017. "Providence Revisited," *Vincentiana* 6 (1993), 594-616, and *He Hears the Cry of the Poor* (New York: New City Press, 1995) 52-72.

McNeil, Betty Ann D.C. (1994). "Last Will and Testament of Saint Louise de Marillac," *Vincentian Heritage Journal*: Vol. 15: Iss. 2, Article 1, p. 108.. Available at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj/vol15/iss2/1>

Moltmann, Jürgen. 2018. *Über Geduld, Barmherzigkeit und Solidarität* (Gütersloher Verlagshaus, p. 13.

Moore, Thomas. 1992. *Care of the Soul* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992) 44.

Péguy, Charles. 2018. *Portico of the Mystery of Hope*. Originally published 1911.

Plato. 2019. "The Phaedrus," <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/phaedrus.html>

Rahner, Karl. 1966. "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore, Md.: Helicon, 1966) 323-46.

Shakespeare, William. 2020. *Hamlet* V.ii.229; originally published 1623.

Shakespeare, William. 2018. *King Lear* V.ii.10-12: "Ripeness is all." First Performance 1606.

Shakespeare, William. 2018. *Julius Caesar* IV.iii.217-223. Originally published 1599.

Solnit, Rebecca. 2016. *Hope in the Dark* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2016) 11.