



Pilgrims of Hope: In What Sense?

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Abstract

This reflection explores the meaning of the Jubilee theme “*Pilgrims of Hope*” in a historical moment marked by mistrust, despair, and uncertainty about the future. Hope is presented not as a vague wish or individual feeling, but as a fundamental human and theological virtue that enables individuals and communities to face evil, suffering, and apparent failure without surrendering to resignation. Rooted in an anthropological and Christian vision, hope affirms that good has a deeper resonance than evil and that life remains open to transformation beyond what is immediately visible. In contrast to a culture dominated by fear, security obsession, technological control, and disillusionment, hope becomes a communal and generative force capable of inspiring social, ecclesial, and humanitarian action. Christian hope, distinct from mere expectation or optimism, carries the promise that evil does not have the last word. As “pilgrims of hope,” believers are called to resist despair, foster creative transformation, and contribute courageously to building a more humane future.

Cette réflexion explore la signification du thème du Jubilé « *Pèlerins de l'espérance* » dans un moment historique marqué par la méfiance, le désespoir et l'incertitude quant à l'avenir. L'espérance n'est pas présentée comme un vague souhait ou un sentiment individuel, mais comme une vertu humaine et théologique fondamentale qui permet aux individus et aux communautés d'affronter le mal, la souffrance et l'échec apparent sans céder à la résignation. Ancrée dans une vision anthropologique et chrétienne, l'espérance affirme que le bien a une résonance plus profonde que le mal et que la vie reste ouverte à une transformation au-delà de ce qui est immédiatement visible. Contrairement à une culture dominée par la peur, l'obsession de la sécurité, le contrôle technologique et la désillusion, l'espérance devient une force communautaire et génératrice capable d'inspirer l'action sociale, ecclésiale et humanitaire. L'espérance chrétienne, qui se distingue de la simple attente ou de l'optimisme, porte la promesse que le mal n'aura pas le dernier mot. En tant que « pèlerins de l'espérance », les croyants sont appelés à résister au désespoir, à favoriser une transformation créative et à contribuer courageusement à l'avenir de l'humanité.

Esta reflexión explora el significado del tema del Jubileo «*Peregrinos de la esperanza*» en un momento histórico marcado por la desconfianza, la desesperanza y la incertidumbre sobre el futuro. La esperanza se presenta no como un deseo vago o un sentimiento individual, sino como una virtud humana y teológica fundamental que permite a las personas y a las comunidades afrontar el mal, el sufrimiento y el aparente fracaso sin rendirse a la resignación. Arraigada en una visión antropológica y cristiana, la esperanza afirma que el bien tiene una resonancia más profunda que el mal y que la vida permanece abierta a una transformación más allá de lo que es inmediatamente visible. En contraste con una cultura dominada por el miedo, la obsesión por la seguridad, el control tecnológico y la desilusión, la esperanza se convierte en una fuerza comunitaria y generativa capaz de inspirar la acción social, eclesial y humanitaria. La esperanza cristiana, distinta de la mera expectativa o el optimismo, lleva consigo la promesa de que el mal



no tiene la última palabra. Como «peregrinos de la esperanza», los creyentes están llamados a resistir la desesperanza, fomentar la transformación creativa y contribuir con valentía a la construcción de un futuro más humano.

Keywords: Pilgrims of hope, Hope, Humanity, Jubilee.

We are now in the final phase of the 2025 Universal Jubilee, whose official title is “Pilgrims of Hope”: a title chosen to emphasize the importance of pilgrimage as a metaphor for the journey of life and as a path of hope toward redemption and inner peace. The motto “Pilgrims of Hope” refers to hope as a fundamental theological virtue in Christian life, together with faith and charity. The Jubilee, therefore, is seen as an opportunity to rediscover one’s faith through gestures of charity and love for one’s neighbor, keeping alive trust in God’s love and mercy.

But what sense can it make to speak of hope in a time that seems marked by many forms of despair, closure, resignation, and anger? I propose a brief reflection with the aim of giving concrete expression, as individuals, as a Congregation, as humanity, to the invitation to become “pilgrims of hope” in our lives and in our relationships.

There is enough confusion surrounding hope. Even everyday language seems to have lost its significance, reducing it to a generic wish that things will turn out well, by virtue of some good luck.

In reality, hope, even before being a theological virtue (Christian hope), is a fundamental human experience that allows men and women, groups and communities, entire societies, to go through times of darkness while continuing to walk toward the future with serenity, even when it does not appear rosy at all.

In everyday life, it is almost impossible not to have to deal with evil. It is a reality inevitably linked to our creaturely nature, which is good in itself but, as we say as believers, fallen because of sin. Yet, even from an anthropological standpoint, the resonance of good is stronger than the resonance of evil. Hope reflects this resonance, which is expressed in the concreteness of our existence.

Texts, writings, and the testimony of prophets, saints, and heroes help us understand that good is capable of overcoming even what sometimes appears inhuman in our lives; in other words, evil and death do not have the last word on life. Within us we preserve an indestructible trust, a primordial knowledge that allows us to recognize good and to make our hearts vibrate in harmony with it.

This is not a mathematical or scientific certainty, but a wisdom of life, a taste of existence, which the Creator himself has placed in our hearts. In the words of Pope Francis, we could say that it is rooted in the depths of every human being as a thirst, a yearning, *“an aspiration, a longing for a life of fulfillment, a desire to achieve great things, things that fill our heart and lift our spirit.... Hope is bold; it can look beyond personal convenience ... it can open us up to grand ideals that make life more beautiful and worthwhile”* (Fratelli tutti, n. 55).

Hope is what enables us to look beyond the visible reality, which can often seem disappointing, different from what we would expect and which at times can lead us to believe that good does not exist. Hope enables us to imagine what does not yet exist, to see what is not there, to convince us that the possible always has a door open to the impossible. Yet it is precisely this impossible that is the true space of human life. Without hope, no change is possible.

Hope is not simply an individual virtue. It is a communal, social dynamism. It is different from desire, which is individual. It is part of an imaginary world made up of words, myths, and ideals capable of mobilizing consciences. *“If one dreams alone, it*

remains a dream; if the dream is shared with others, it is already the beginning of reality” (Helder Camara).

There are influential people capable of instilling the conviction that something good can happen. When this occurs, hope becomes collective, capable of driving social, political, ecclesial, community, and humanitarian action. Therefore, hope is not a private sentiment. It is a force that can transform reality, both individual and communal, precisely because it initiates processes capable of setting in motion what does not yet exist.

A time of mistrust

Sociological studies show that today, in so-called advanced societies, forms of depression are increasingly widespread and suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people, after road accidents, often linked to alcohol, drug abuse, and speeding. How can we explain this sensational fact? Could it be linked to the fact that in such societies there is a total lack of a vision of the future that is not just technical innovation?

In the aftermath of the collapse of ideologies toward the end of the last century, hope spread throughout the world that, through trade, economic exchange, and technology, it would finally be possible to build a unified and peaceful world, capable of offering everyone the prospect of improving their lives. Of course, this was a rather earthly hope, linked to material things.

It did not take long to discover that this hope was illusory: increasing global inequality, climate change with its terrible consequences, COVID, and the reactivation of war theaters are now pushing us toward a very different season, characterized by great mistrust, if not outright despair about the future.

Confirming the loss of hope, we are now witnessing the growth of an obsession with security in two forms: that of institutions that use force (the police or the army) and that of technical control of reality. Now, the demand for security weakens hope, reducing it to biological survival. The obsessive pursuit of the myth of “zero risk” kills hope: only those who hope are ready to take risks in life.

The invasion of digital technologies, which are becoming increasingly pervasive, also reduces the space for hope. The weakening of the religious sense of life and transcendence pushes contemporary man to place his trust solely in technological innovation, which ultimately leaves no room for hope.

The importance of hope in our time

This seems to me to be the scenario, perhaps too bleak for some, in which the Jubilee invites us to become “pilgrims of hope.” What does this mean in concrete terms? What can we contribute?

The first thing we can do is not let ourselves be overwhelmed by mistrust or even despair (a total lack of hope). Let us not forget that our history is marked by dark and difficult moments, from which humanity has managed to emerge precisely by giving credence to hope. To take a step beyond reality as it is, we need a forward momentum, a movement of creative self-transcendence that allows every human being to be generative and the history of humanity always to rise from its falls.

Who are the true “pilgrims of hope”? They are those who know how to distinguish between hope and expectation. Hope is faith in the goodness of human nature, while expectation “is counting on results that are planned and controlled by man” (Ivan Illich). In a world of expectations, which inevitably come to be disappointed sooner or later, we need to rediscover the Christian virtue of hope. Sowing despair is a strategy of

domination, which we must resist by giving voice to paths of hope that commit us to building a new and more humane world for future generations.

Christian hope carries within it a promise: the promise that the last word will not be evil, but good. In Christian terminology, this promise is called “salvation” and is very different from security; it concerns not only our biological survival, but the wholeness of our person, the dignity, freedom, and spirit that give full meaning to our existence.

Hope is also vision; that is, a desire that, in confrontation with the harsh reality of life, takes shape, even if its boundaries are still undetermined. It is a generative desire, capable of renewing the organizational, institutional, and cultural forms of human coexistence. We are invited to do this as “pilgrims of hope” in a world that seems increasingly desperate!

Hope is a constructive force in history, not an emotional state or a collection of good feelings, nor is it the prerogative of beautiful souls. It does not shy away from difficulties, but rather faces them with courage, creativity, and the ability to mediate and resolve the conflicts that inevitably arise. From this point of view, it is something different from simple optimism.

Last but not least, we must not forget that hope is a virtue, for us believers a theological virtue, which carries within itself something divine. It gives us the courage of truth, the ability to resist defeat, to change the status quo, to fight against injustice, to break down walls, to build bridges, as Pope Francis has taught us.

The reward for those who act out of hope does not lie primarily in the accomplishment of their work, but rather in the process they set in motion, which, as it grows, becomes clearer and more consolidated. In this our time, which shatters certainties and overturns habits, we can write a new page in our history, within a future that is not yet written, but which will certainly be written by those who know how to become true “pilgrims of hope.”

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