

CHAPTER 6

HOPE

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Hope is one of the great virtues - faith, hope and love (1 Corinthians 13:13). Faith begets hope and he who has hope in God loves Him. And by love one reaches the summit of his relation with God. Hence we see the strong ties between the three great virtues. It is not possible to separate them, though it is possible to distinguish between them. Love depends on faith and hope, faith depends on hope and love, and hope depends on faith and love.

The importance of hope is obvious, since he who loses hope loses everything with it, even life itself. That is, when he loses hope he falls into despair and depression. **It is hope which pushes man to toil and strive, whether in his physical or spiritual life.** If the feeling of hopelessness and despair get hold of him, he will completely stop working and striving. **Thus hope is a driving force in the life of man.**

As hope is tied to faith and love, **it is also tied to joy.** One may fall into a certain sin, yet hope fills him with the Spirit and as a result his sadness disappears and is replaced with joy.

Hope is a free gift from God. The Apostle Paul says: "Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us **and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace,** comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work" (2 Thessalonians 2:16, 17).

The opposite of hope is despair or hopelessness. Our salvation is by hope, and if hope is a free gift from God, it is tied to the free salvation of man. The Apostle Paul says: "**For we were saved in this hope,** but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance" (Romans 8:24, 25).

In this subject we deal with the virtue of hope, its effect and importance in the life of man on a personal level. **Yet, as the Apostle Paul says, before anything else, this personal hope is tied to the hope in the "Lord Jesus Christ, our hope"** (1 Timothy 1:1). **Without Him we can do nothing** (John 15:5), **Christ, all things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made** (John 1:3).

St. Paul who experienced Christ said: "**I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me**" (Philippians 4:13), **Christ is our hope - not only in the present life but also in the life to come - otherwise we are of all men the most pitiable** (1 Corinthians 15:19). **Because of this strong tie, we find it necessary to speak first about the Lord Jesus as our hope.**

A) CHRIST IS OUR HOPE

In his Epistle to the Colossians the Apostle Paul reveals "The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations" which is "Christ (is) the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:26, 27), and in his first Epistle to his Disciple Timothy he speaks about: "The Lord Jesus Christ, our hope" (1 Timothy 1:1).

Jesus Christ our Lord is the hope of all the world: before He came in the flesh, when He was in the flesh and He is still the hope of millions after He completed the Salvation and ascended to Heaven. We notice that God from the beginning gave man hope after his fall in His promise that "the seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent" (Genesis 3:15).

1 - CHRIST: HOPE OF THE ATHEISTS:

It was not only the righteous people of the children of God in the Old Testament who expressed their hope in the coming of the Saviour **but also the atheists!**

We read that a vision appeared to the Apostle Paul at night when he was in the city of Troas. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "**Come over to Macedonia and help us**" (Acts 16:9). **The words of this atheist were none other than the cries of the multitudes of the Gentiles asking for help, with or without knowing of the unknown Saviour Who will free them. Simeon the Elder expressed that about Christ by the spirit of revelation: "A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles"** (Luke 2:32).

Anthropologists discovered that atheist nations were anxious for a champion, and a saviour to free them. **They found that the people of Galia (most probably in present France) were keeping a statue and an altar to a virgin who will give them a child who would free them! How was that? We do not like to think that Christianity extracted some of its dogmas from atheistic beliefs.**

We say that when God created the world, the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of waters, though the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep (Genesis 1:2). **We should not think that God deals only with His people, and not with atheist nations. God visits the atheists by His own means. Besides, all different nations inherited one legacy from the first father of humanity, Adam, who was promised by God that a Saviour would be coming.**

Something similar was found in Mexico. Mexican people had carved in the rocks and on public buildings statues of a god who would crush the beast. **Again similar things were found in**

China, India, Iran, Greece, Italy and Ancient Egypt. Plato was waiting for this person (god) and said: "When this person comes he will teach us everything, I am waiting anxiously to know him".

The Roman poet Virgil rejoiced for the coming of this Saviour and said: "Time has come, a young child is sent from heaven for us, and in his time the traces of our crimes will be wiped out. The earth will no more experience fear. He will take his place among the gods and will rule the quiet world by the power of the virtues of his father. Welcome dear son, the son of Jupiter, look at the Universe, it stands respectfully in front of you greeting you. Look, everyone is glad and is rejoicing by the coming of the new era".

Hence the ancient world, its different nations and religions -in spite of their diversities and misunderstandings - were waiting and hoping though in a vague way - for the arrival of this Saviour who will be sent one day from heaven to free them. The younger son in the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke, Chapter 15) refers to the atheist nations which were suffering from bad conditions yet had hope that God (the father of the Prodigal Son) would accept them.

St. Athanasius the Apostolic speaks about the way by which Christ died and says: "**The invitation was for all the nations because it is not possible for a person to die with his arms stretched apart except on the Cross. It was appropriate for the Lord to suffer this death, and to stretch His arms so that with one hand He draws the ancient people, and with the other he draws the Gentiles and the two unite in His Person. This was what He Himself said, referring to the kind of death by which He would redeem everyone: "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself"** (John 12:32)".

2 - CHRIST: HOPE OF THE JEWS BEFORE HIS COMING:

The Jewish people in their great hope for the coming of the Saviour Christ were eager to express this hope when they stood to pray, or when they went to the temple to present a sacrifice or an oblation. That was a reflection of the Jewish religion which expressed hope and exhibited weakness, asked for help and waited at the same time, and continuously looked for the future.

The enormous building of the Temple was erected on the high rock upon which the city of Jerusalem was built. The Temple as a unit symbolised the one sacrifice of the Cross. Meanwhile the different sacrifices and burnt offerings which were presented every day declared the ineffectiveness of man's efforts and called for the perfect sacrifice of the Cross, referring to the power which will appear one day in the sacrifice of the Incarnated God.

Many righteous men of God in the Old Testament expressed their hope in the coming of the Saviour Christ, for whom they waited since the time of Adam. The Psalmist said: "You who dwell between the cherubim, shine forth! Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, stir up Your strength, and come and save us!" (Psalm 80:1, 2). The Prophet Isaiah said: "Yes, in the way of

Your judgments, O Lord, we have waited for You; the desire of our soul is for Your name and for the remembrance of You" (Isaiah 26:8). **The longing of Isaiah for the coming of the Saviour intensified as he expressed his hope to Him by saying: "Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down!"** (Isaiah 64:1).

The Lord Jesus summarizes all that by saying: "For assuredly, I say to you that **many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it**" (Matthew 13:17).

Hope in the coming of the Savior was realized for some righteous people in the Old Testament and they saw Him with their own eyes. Among them was Simeon the Elder who lived a long time: "So he (Simeon the Elder) came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation" (Luke 2:28-30).

Simeon the Elder was not alone in bearing witness to the Redeemer. There was also **a widow; Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fasting and prayers night and day.** She gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:36-38).

3 - CHRIST: HOPE OF THE JEWS AND THE ATHEISTS WHEN HE WAS IN THE FLESH

When Lord Jesus, the hope of the world, was in the flesh on earth "He went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (Matthew 9:35, 36). These verses by Matthew are collective verses which describe the work of the Redeemer and His ministry among the multitude. He looked for the people and some people looked for Him.

He went to the Samaritan woman, and as He was talking to her she said: "I know that Messiah is coming (who is called Christ). When He comes, He will tell us all things". Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He" (John 4:25, 26). The worship of the Samaritan people was Jewish in nature combined with atheism. They were also waiting for the coming of the Messiah (who is called Christ).

Jesus looked for Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector (Luke, Chapter 19), **and for Levi a tax collector** sitting at the tax office and called them to be Disciples for Him (Matthew 9:9). **He cared for the man who had an infirmity thirty-eight years at Bethesda** (John, Chapter 5)

and looked for the man who was born blind (John, Chapter 9), and many other people. His call for all of them was: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Multitudes of Jews looked for Him and gathered around him, a fact which aroused the feeling of rivalry of the Priests and their chiefs as well as of other Jewish religious denominations .They said to each other: "You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!" (John 12:19). As an example, **in the miracle of the healing of the paralytic who was carried by four men**, St. Mark wrote: "He (Jesus) entered Capernaum ..., and it was heard that He was in the house. Immediately **many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door"**. And when they (the four men) could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying (Mark 2:1-4).

Again after the miracle of the healing of the mother-in-law of Simon Peter, when His news spread to the surrounding regions around Galilee **"the whole city was gathered together at the door"** (Mark 1:33). Once more when the Samaritan woman was amazed at what Jesus told her and how He unveiled the secrets of her life, she went to the city and told the people. Then they went out of the city and came to Him. And they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days (John 4:30, 40).

St. Mark the Evangelist presents a remarkable picture for the coming of the people to Jesus and says: they "began to carry about on beds those who were sick to wherever they heard He was. Wherever He entered, into villages, cities, or the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged Him that they might just touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched Him were made well" (Mark 6:55, 56). And when He had come into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday: "all the city was moved, saying, "Who is this?" (Matthew 21:10).

That was about the multitude of the Jews seeking Jesus. Yet the Holy Gospels are full of events of Jewish persons who came to Him and He healed them and gave them rest.

Again many of the Gentiles came to Jesus such as the Canaanite Woman who persisted in asking Jesus with great faith. He said to her: "O woman, great is your faith!" (Matthew 15:28), **and the Centurion whose servant was ill and deserved that Jesus witness to his faith: "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!"** (Matthew 8:10).

4 -CHRIST: HOPE OF ALL THE BELIEVERS AFTER HIS ASCENSION TO HEAVEN

In the first chapter of the Book of Acts, St. Luke describes the event of the Ascension of the Lord Jesus to Heaven, forty days after His Resurrection. After recording the last words of the Lord

to His Disciples, St. Luke says: "A cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner". Then they returned to Jerusalem" (Acts 1:9-12).

That overwhelming scene - the scene of the Disciples of the Lord gazing up to Him as He was ascending to Heaven - pictures the hope of the Christians in Christ Who ascended to Heaven. In a spiritual sense they are still gazing to Him whom St. Paul calls: "Christ the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27), and He Himself said: "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself" (John 12:32). He is the hidden treasure for which a man goes and sells all that he has and buys it (Matthew 13:44), and if Christ is the hidden treasure, we are reminded about the fact: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:34).

We perceive the hope in Christ and the longing for Him from the words of St. Paul to the Philippians about himself: "Having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better" (Philippians 1:23). The Apostle John says: "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:2, 3). St. John also describes that as a conclusion to the Book of Revelation which is the conclusion to the whole of the New Testament: "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20).

In fact at the time of the Apostles the Christians lived in the hope of the near second coming of Christ. They understood in a literal sense the words of the Apostle Paul: "The Lord is at hand" (Philippians 4:5). In the same way they understood the words of St. John in his Revelation: "... for the time is at hand" (Revelation 22:10), and "Behold, I am coming quickly!" (Revelation 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20).

That understanding was reflected in the life of some of the Christians in that era as they stopped going to their work in order to find time for worship as they were waiting for the near second coming of the Lord! Such misunderstanding and style of life prompted the Apostle Paul to expound correcting that matter. He wrote to the Thessalonians saying: "Now, brethren, **concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you**, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, **as though the day of Christ had come**. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition" (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3).

Nevertheless, that feeling and longing for the coming of Christ did not stop, as He is the hope of all the believers and their desires are always directed to Him. The Church expresses that each time she celebrates the Eucharist at the moment of consecrating the bread and wine. The priest says: "Therefore as we commemorate His Holy passion, His Resurrection from the dead, His Ascension into heaven, His sitting at Your right hand, O Father, and His second

coming which shall be from the heavens, awesome and full of glory; we offer unto You Your oblations from what is Yours for every condition, concerning every condition and in every condition".

B) HOPE AND CHRIST IN THE GOSPELS

The word hope (elpise in the Greek language) never occurred in the Gospels in the spiritual theological sense as a virtue. It occurred five times in the Gospels in different meanings (Matthew 12:21; Luke 6:34; 23:8; 24:21; John 5:45).

The absence of this word from the Gospels and from the teachings of Christ attract our attention, particularly when we remember that Judaism, which was the religion of the Lord Jesus in the flesh and of His Disciples, was a religion of hope. Moreover, the results of the teachings of the Lord Jesus were to strengthen and deepen the hope with what the richness of the Christian faith offers. **We see clearly that the religious hope in the Old Testament was great. Yet that hope is very little when it is compared to the "better hope"** (Hebrews 7:19), which is based on the Royal unchangeable Priesthood of Christ.

No doubt that the Disciples anticipated great future. They were like captives of the greatness of the personality of the Lord Jesus and His profound love. They realized that the hope of Israel was in Him. **If Simeon the Elder, who carried the child Jesus in his arms, felt that his hope had been realized, the Disciples were without doubt overwhelmed by Him and were not thinking of any aspirations or expectations related to the future.**

But why was Jesus, Who taught about the necessity of faith (Mark 11:22; John 3:16), and of love (Matthew 22:37-40), silent about Hope. **The reason is that as Jesus was training His followers the first requirement for them was to concentrate on His blessed personality. He taught them clearly about what awaits them - the glory in the world to come. Therefore the meaning of hope was in deed implicit in the teachings of Christ, even though the word "hope" as a spiritual virtue did not occur in the literal sense.**

C) HOPE AND OTHER VIRTUES

Hope is related to other virtues: to our love to God and faith in Him, to repentance and to joy and comfort.

1 - LOVE:

Hope is a motivation and support for love - our love to God. It is like waiting for dawn and the first rays of daylight. Yet we have to know that we shall not realize our hope all at once. There is an important difference between the way we count time and that of God. **We measure the day starting from the morning, with the beauty of the sunrise. Then the day ends with darkness, sadness and tragedy at night. Yet the first chapter of the Book of Genesis shows us that God, the creator of the six days, started His count from the evening: "So the evening and the morning were one day" (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 31). He starts from the evening and proceeds to the morning until He reaches the powerful midday.**

Hence, it is worthwhile for our lives to proceed with such grading: from limited hope and limited love which resemble morning light to the intense heat of midday which represents unlimited love. We enter to the unlimited love by "the door of hope", about which God says in the Book of Hosea: "I will give her vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt" (Hosea 2:15). This entering is considered the beginning of the possession (of the unlimited love), not the total possession (we should realise that unlimited love can possess us while we cannot possess it).

We also remember the word of Christ to the Angel of the Church of Philadelphia: "See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it" (Revelation 3:8). This open door which no one can shut is the door of hope and is itself what God pointed to in the Book of Hosea. It is the door which leads us to the Kingdom of Heaven!

In loving God, we must have had many chances escape from us. Yet hope intervenes and stops us from grieving. It whispers in our ears saying: Those chances which were lost do not compare with the new chances which God will offer us. If before my death God gives me one chance only, it is possible for me to use it for the salvation of my soul, like the right hand thief on

the cross. If I make good use of it, it will compensate for all the previous lost chances. God opens the door of hope for us every day and every moment.

2 - FAITH:

Hope is the virtue which mediates between faith and love. Faith reveals our sonship to God, and by its very nature, sonship is a relation of trust and dependency. As in our life on earth, this relation is strengthened by hope and as a result, love is established. This means that faith approaches love through hope. The Apostle Paul says: "But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us" (1 Thessalonians 5:8-10).

Talking about the relation between hope and faith, St. Augustine says: "Hope is a companion to faith. It is necessary as long as you do not see Whom you believe in, lest you despair from lack of seeing and you lose faith. You grieve because you do not see, but you get comfort when you hope to see. **Then let your hope accompany your faith.** There are difficulties in the present, but there is hope in the future. If you do not find comfort in the hope of the future about the difficulties which you now encounter, you will no doubt perish.

You believe in the present and you see in the future. As long as you believe, hope is alive. As long as you are in the flesh, you are away from Christ. **You are a passenger who proceeds by faith and not by seeing. Your salvation now is based on hope and not on what was promised because you did not yet get what was promised to you, but you hope for it.** Christ tells you: "The hope of the unbelievers is in the present, and yours is in the future. Their hope vanishes but yours is guaranteed. Their hope is not real but yours is true".

Build hope in your heart and expel the lack of belief. The believer says: "Lord, I believe in your promises. I believed in the past promises, and I know the present promises, and I hope in the future promises. You are my hope here, Lord, and you are my share in the land of the living".

3 - REPENTANCE:

At the beginning of the road of repentance Satan confronts man with despair. On one hand he makes the road of repentance hard for man and on the other hand he uncovers his past which contains terrible sins. Satan does his best to let man fall into despair, so that he returns back to sin.

At this stage hope is very useful for man; Satan pulls him backward and hope gives him a good push forward. Judas Iscariot and Simon Peter committed terrible sins; the former sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver and the latter denied Christ and blasphemed with

curse and swearing in front of an ordinary servant girl, not even in front of a ruler, governor or a king. Yet Simon Peter realised his sin, was terribly sorrowful, and wept bitterly. The Lord accepted him and restored him to his Apostolic status by telling him: "Feed My Lambs ..., Tend My sheep ..., Feed My sheep" (John 21:15, 16, 17). Yet Judas Iscariot lost his hope and went and hanged himself. Had Judas regretted what he did and repented, Jesus would have accepted him as He did Peter.

Peter expressed his hope in his first Epistle by saying: **"Rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you"** (1 Peter 1:13) and **"Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear"** (1 Peter 3:15).

The Book "Paradise of the Monks" mentions a story of a brother who lived in a monastery and used to fall many times into the sin of adultery. He hated himself and was ready to leave the monastic life. Yet he was careful to complete his daily worship by saying the Psalms, fasting and prostration. In his prayer he used to say: "Lord, You see my bad state and my sadness, pull me up Lord whether I want it or not. I am like mud, I desire sin and I like it. But You are strong Lord, make me abstain from this filth. It would be strange if You have mercy on the saints only, or You only save the pure who deserve to be saved. Show Your amazing work of mercy in me who is not worthy. I submit myself to You". He used to say this prayer every day whether he sinned or not.

One day Satan was irritated by his hopefulness and appeared to him when he was reading his Psalms and said to him: "Are you not ashamed to stand between the hands of God and call His name with your unclean lips?". The brother replied: "You do one thing and I do another thing. You let me fall in sin and I ask the Merciful God to have compassion on me. I fight you in this manner until death reaches me and I do not abandon my hope in my Lord. I do not cease preparing myself to stand against you and we shall see who will win, you or the mercy of God".

When the devil heard that he said to him: "From now on I shall not wage a war against you, in order not for you to win a crown because of your hope in your God", and the devil left him from that day.

The brother came back to himself and wept bitterly for his past sins. Whenever he fell haughty, he used to remember his past sins and whenever he felt in despair he hoped in God and remembered His love to sinners.

St. Augustine said: "If sin is not pulled out of you, hope in forgiveness should not be pulled out of you. The waves of the sea trouble us, yet we drop our anchors on the land of hope".

4 - JOY AND COMFORT:

Hope brings peace and joy to the heart, as the Apostle Paul says to the Romans: "Rejoicing

in hope" (Romans 12:12). Sin takes away the peace from the soul and lack of hope causes anxiety. Hope calms down the heart and replaces sadness with joy and fills the heart with comfort.

St. Augustine says: "Hope is necessary for you as you travel and is a comfort on the road. When you get tired you remember that after some times you will reach your destination. If you take away the hope of arriving, you soon lose your energy and will be unable to continue. You do now what you hope will be fruitful and that you will enjoy these fruits. You are happy when you strive and you are even happier when you reap the harvest. If hope has this sweetness, reality is sweeter".

The subject of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead presents to us an important thought about hope. Christ changed the sadness of His Disciples to joy. He calmed those who were afraid and who locked the doors and windows of the Upper Room. He stood in their midst and said to them: "Peace be with you" (John 20:19, 21, 26). Likewise, when our situations darken, matters complicate, difficulties intensify, enemies increase and people say: "There is no hope for him in God" (Psalm 3:2), we still have hope in Christ the Saviour and joy encounters hope.

On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene brought spices and went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and when she saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb she ran and told Peter and John (John 20:1, 2). When the two Disciples found the tomb empty they went away. But Mary sat at the tomb weeping (John 20:13). She did not leave at once because she hoped to see her Lord and Beloved. She was rewarded for her hope. She saw two angels at the tomb and then she saw the Lord Jesus Himself and He spoke to her. She was the first person to see the Lord after His Resurrection and the first person to spread the good news to the Disciples (John, Chapter 20).

D) WHY DO WE PUT OUR HOPE IN GOD

We put our hope in God because of His attributes and His promises:

1 - THE MIGHT OF GOD:

Among God's attributes is His Almightyness, being able to do everything. We hope in Him because of this. Obviously a man does not hope for anything or any matter from a weak person who has no power. The men of God experienced the power of God, realized it and praised Him.

The Psalmist says: "Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His face evermore!" (Psalm 105:4) and the Prophet David says: "Your saints shall bless You. They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom, and talk of Your power, **to make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of His kingdom**" (Psalm 145:10-12).

In the Book of Isaiah, God asks in astonishment: "Is My hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem? **Or have I no power to deliver?**" (Isaiah 50:2). The Apostle Paul prays for the people of Ephesus so that God the Father may give them the spirit of wisdom in the knowledge of Him that they may know "what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, **and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power**" (Ephesians 1:16-19). Again when the Apostle Peter speaks about God, he points to the fact that "**His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness**, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue" (2 Peter 1:3).

When man feels that he puts his hope about a certain matter in the hands of the Almighty, he calms down and is rested, knowing that his matters are in the hands of a mighty God. God is able to keep us from evil people and their conspiracies and from the devil and all his traps. In total, God is able to take care of us according to His promises.

2 - THE LOVE OF GOD:

Our belief in the love of God for all humans in general, and for sinners in particular, makes us come to Him with hope. **We trust in the love of God to us, and for that we have hope in Him.** The word of the Lord Jesus to the angel of the Church of Philadelphia encourages us and fills our hearts with hope. It unveils the Divine Love which increases and strengthens our hope in Him: "These things says He who is holy, ... He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens, I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; ... **Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial**" (Revelation 3:7-10).

3 - GOD'S PROMISES:

Numerous are the promises of God for us. The Holy Bible with its two Testaments are full of God's promises, which St. Peter describe as "exceedingly great and precious" (2 Peter 1:4). **God is truthful in His promises because "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent"** (Numbers 23:19) **and He is not slack concerning His promise** (2 Peter 3:9). All the good promises of God are for you if you love Him: "All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). **St. Paul says: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful"** (Hebrews 10:23).

God is faithful in all the promises which He gave us. In the prayer of consecration of the Temple which Solomon built, he was correct when he said: "Blessed be the Lord, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised. **There has not failed one word of all His good promise**" (1 Kings 8:56). Joshua was also correct when he became old and said to Elders of Israel in his farewell speech: "Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. **And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you; not one word of them has failed**" (Joshua 23:14).

4 - GOD'S CARE:

We trust in God for His care for us. He said: "I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5, 6). When He was incarnated, God chose a name for Himself showing that He is with us always: "and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, "God with us" (Matthew 1:23).

Sweet are the promises of God which express His care for His children. He says in Isaiah: "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? **Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands**" (Isaiah 49:15, 16). He also says by the Prophet Zechariah: "**He who touches you touches the apple of His eye**" (Zechariah 2:8).

The last promise which the Lord Jesus gave to us in the person of His Disciples was: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). The Psalmist says: "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes" (Psalm 118:8).

The Lord Jesus promised that "**the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (the Church)**" (Matthew 16:18) and said about the believers: "**neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand**" (John 10:28, 29).

John saw Him in the Revelation "In the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, ... He had in His right hand seven stars" (Revelation 1:13, 16). Yes, the Lord Jesus Christ is still in the midst of His Church and still holds by His Hand the ministers of the Churches and His children.

E) WHAT STRENGTHENS OUR HOPE?

Like other virtues, hope grows. The Apostle Paul said to the Romans: "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, **that you may abound in hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13). **If hope grows, how do we strengthen our hope?**

a - By realizing the attributes of God and thinking about them, particularly His love, mercy and His care for His children. We mentioned this point earlier.

b - By reading the Holy Bible: The Apostle Paul says: "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

c - Difficulties and patience will strengthen our hope in God. The Apostle Paul says: "**Knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint**" (Romans 5:3-5).

In the fourteenth year of **King Hezekiah, Sennacherib, King of Assyria, came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them.** Then Hezekiah, King of Judah, sent to the King of Assyria at Lachish saying, "I have done wrong; turn away from me; whatever you impose on me I will pay". So Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasuries of the king's house. At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord, and from the pillars which Hezekiah King of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the King of Assyria.

Then the King of Assyria sent the Tartan with a great army against Jerusalem, to King

Hezekiah. Then the commander of the army said to the men of Hezekiah: **"Say now to Hezekiah, "Thus says the great king, the King of Assyria: "What confidence is this in which you trust? And in whom do you trust, that you rebel against me?" and he reproached the Living God of Israel"**.

And so it was, when King Hezekiah heard it, that he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth and went into the house of the Lord. Then he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe and the elders of the priests covered with sackcloth to Isaiah the Prophet, the son of Amoz. And they asked him to raise up his prayer for the remnant (of Israel) that was left.

Then the commander of the army of Sennacherib send to Hezekiah threatening him saying: **"Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you"**. **And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord. Then Hezekiah prayed before the Lord, and said: "O Lord God of Israel, Incline Your ear, O Lord, and hear; open Your eyes, O Lord, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. Now therefore, O Lord our God, I pray, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the Lord God, You alone"**. Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: "Because you have prayed to Me against Sennacherib King of Assyria, I have heard".

And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the Lord went out and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning there were the corpses-- all dead. So Sennacherib, King of Assyria departed and returned home and remained at Nineveh. Now it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the temple of Nisroch his god, that his sons struck him down with the sword; and he died (2 Kings, Chapters 18, 19).

We see that the great difficulty which Hezekiah faced was a source of strengthening his hope. He went up to the house of the Lord, and spread the letter of Sennacherib before the Lord, as if he was saying to the Lord: "To whom can I go, You are help to those who have no help and hope to those who have no hope".

d - By reading spiritual books, specially about the lives of the men of God. That is to understand His dealings with them. The saints - in spite of the spiritual attacks and the temptations which they faced - their hope in God never diminished. They never doubted in His love and His care.

They were certain that God was tempting them for their good and for their wellbeing, that they may become partakers of His holiness (Hebrews 12:10). **They waited on Him until He lifted the temptations from them: "My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the**

morning-- yes, more than those who watch for the morning" (Psalm 130:6), "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord!" (Psalm 27:14).

F) CHRIST: HOPE FOR THE TIRED PEOPLE

1 - HOPE FOR THE SICK:

Many are the sick who hoped in Christ and He healed them. **We here present three cases; healing of the sick of Bethesda, the daughter of the Canaanite woman the hemorrhaging woman.**

a - The Sick of Bethesda (John 5:1-14):

This man had an infirmity for a very long time, for 38 years. Besides physical pain, it seemed that he also suffered from psychological pain. Jesus unveiled that the secret of his illness was sin. After healing him, Christ told him openly: "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you" (John 5:14).

The Jews did not deal with the sinners, especially the Jews who thought that they were righteous. They were surprised to see that Jesus sat with sinner and ate and drank with them. Hence the paralytic of Bethesda - as a sinner - was isolated from his own people. When Jesus asked him: "Do you want to be made well?", the sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man ..." (John 5:6, 7). It seems that because of the length of the illness, 38 years, the people left him all together. Christ alone was his hope. The hope of this man was to find someone to put him into the pool when the angel stirred up the water. The God of the angels knew of his case and came to him by Himself and healed him with one command: "Rise, take up your bed and walk".

b - Healing the Daughter of the Canaanite Woman (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30):

The Canaanite woman was a Gentile atheist. Her daughter was severely demon-possessed which made her notoriously mad. This woman had amazing hope in the Lord Jesus that He would heal her daughter. The dialogue between her and the Lord Jesus did not appear friendly or full of compassion. It was the opposite of what we are accustomed from His dealings with other people. Even when he compared her to the dogs, she did not lose her hope and persisted until in the end she got what she wanted: **"O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire". And her daughter was healed from that very hour.**

c - Healing the Hemorrhaging Woman (Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48):

Again this woman suffered from both physical pains and psychological pain. She was having a flow of blood for twelve years. She had spent all that she had going to doctors and she was no better, but rather grew worse! (Mark 5:26). That was beside suffering from her isolation from the society.

According to the Old Testament Law, this woman was perpetually unclean, and "whoever touched her shall be unclean and everything that she laid on shall be unclean; also everything that she sat on shall be unclean, and whoever touched her bed shall be unclean" (Leviticus 15:19-32). If she were married, then the teachers of the Jewish Law gave a legal opinion that such a woman be divorced from her husband. In her misery, this woman had no hope. She heard about Jesus and said to herself: "If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well" (Matthew 9:21).

She had no courage to come to Jesus and ask Him to heal her, as she was considered unclean and rejected from society. She had no choice but to come behind Him in the crowd and to touch His garment. She thought that Christ would not realize what she was doing. When Jesus turned around in the crowd and said: "Who touched My clothes?" His Disciples answered Him: "You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, "Who touched Me?" But Christ felt the touch of the faith of the woman who put her hope in Him.

Christ was the hope of this miserable woman and He healed her from her infirmity with the words: "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction".

2 - HOPE FOR THE SINNERS:

The Lord is the hope for the sinners as He is the hope for the sick. The best example

which the Bible presents to us is that of the sinful woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee, as recorded by St. Luke (Luke 7:36-50).

St. Luke says: "And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner (an adulteress), when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the house of Simon the Pharisee, she "brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears and wipe them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil".

This woman had no hope of a holy life. Her character was known to all the city, and because of her sins the people rejected her. The story says: "Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, and that Jesus did not reject or shout at her, he spoke to himself saying: "This man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner" (Luke 7:39).

The unholy thoughts of this Pharisee and his disapproval of the behaviour of the Lord Jesus towards this woman made Jesus unveiled the love of this sinful woman to the life of repentance, and to Him. Jesus is able to win her soul and offer her forgiveness, as compared to the little love of this Pharisee for God!

This sinful woman realized her many sins and came to Jesus feeling great shame, as she stood at His feet. **But Jesus Who came to deliver the sinners and Who searches the hearts, knew that this woman had put all her hope in Him, and being rejected from society, He did not disappoint her. He exposed her love and her great sorrow and repentance and forgave her sins. He added: "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace".**

3 - HOPE FOR THE SUFFERERS:

We present two events; Christ raising the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17) and the feelings of Jesus towards the sister of Lazarus (John, Chapter 11).

a - The Widow of Nain Who Lost Her Only Son:

The travels of the Lord Jesus from one place to the other were for a purpose. One of His travels was from the city Capernaum to the city of Nain, where He knew that a weeping widow had lost her only son.

We have to comprehend the magnitude of the sorrow of this woman. Her son was a young man and he was her only son. Was anyone able to comfort this woman? I do not think so. Those who tried to comfort her might have aggravated her. Job was right when he said to his friends who came to comfort him: "Miserable comforters are you all!" (Job 16:2). Jesus saw the dead man being

carried out on the way to the grave. St. Luke says: "When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep". Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise". So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother" (Luke 7:13-15).

I do not think that this grieving mother had any hope that her son would be alive again. What was the use of weeping? But Christ Who is the hope for those who have no hope had compassion on her, asked her not to weep, raised her son and presented him to her alive.

b - Mary and Martha the Sisters of Lazarus:

The second encounter is that of Mary and Martha the sisters of Lazarus who from the first moment of the sickness of their brother had hope in Christ. When Lazarus became sick, the sisters sent to Jesus, saying, "**Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick**" (John 11:3). When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was, in order to be glorified by raising Lazarus from the grave. So when Jesus arrived, He found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

As soon as Martha met Jesus she said to Him: "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You" (John 11:21, 22). And when Mary met Jesus she also said the same words of her sister: "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:32). These verses show the great hope which the two sisters had in Jesus. This hope did not stop at Jesus healing Lazarus when he was sick, but extended to after Lazarus' death. We know the result of this hope. Lazarus rose from the dead by the ordering word of Jesus: "Lazarus, come forth!" (John 11:43).

4 - HOPE FOR THE CAST-OFF:

We spoke about the sinful woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee under the title "Christ is the hope for the sinners". **Yet at the same time she is an example of the hope in Christ for the outcast.** The sins of that woman were open and were known to the city. Surely she was cast out from her society. We saw how Jesus accepted her and put her back on the right way.

a - The Man Born Blind:

This is the story of Jesus giving sight to the man born blind, the great miracle in which the Lord Jesus created eyes for him from the mud and put in them light by His word (John, Chapter 9).

This miracle was concluded on a Sabbath. The Pharisees conducted many discussions with the man born blind and with his parents, because in their sight, "Jesus is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath" (John 9:16). The attitude of the parents was shameful when they did not want to speak about the miracle because they feared the Jews, for the Jews agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue (John 9:21, 22).

Yet the attitude of the man born blind was great. He confessed all what Jesus did to him and defended Him and His righteousness: "Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing". And they cast him out (of the synagogue) (John 9:32-34) **(to be cast-out of the synagogue was a severe punishment for the Jews).**

What did Jesus do? "Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" He answered and said, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" And Jesus said to him, "It is He who is talking with you". Then he said, "Lord, I believe!" And he worshipped Him" (John 9:35-38).

Surely Jesus was the hope for him whom the Jews cast out from the synagogue. That punishment is like ex-communication now.

b - The Adulteress Caught in the Very Act:

This is the story of the woman who was caught in adultery, in the very act, whom the Scribes and the Pharisees brought in order to hear His verdict (John 8:3-11).

The Law commanded them that such a woman should be stoned. But what did Jesus say to her? He gave a hard lesson to those who condemned her. He taught that they should instead save themselves. He stooped down and wrote their sins on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear them. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first" (John 8:7).

They all withdrew in shame when the Lord uncovered their hidden sins, and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. He then said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord". And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (John 8:10, 11).

This woman escaped death by a miracle. When she fell into the hands of those Pharisees surely she was going to be stoned to death. Jesus was her hope, He rescued her from the death of the body and the death of sin.

G) EXAMPLES OF PERSONS WHO KEPT HOLD ON HOPE

1 - Monica the Righteous:

She was the mother of St. Augustine who slipped down to the depth of sin and later he repented and reached great heights in virtue. God visited this soul for the sake of the prayers and perseverance of his righteous mother. **What concerns us here is to speak about her hope in the repentance of her son, which was realized by her continuous prayers for him.**

It was not only her son for whom she hoped in God, but also her husband. The fruits of her hope appeared first in her husband, and then were realised in Augustine. She married an atheist evil man. His mother and even the servants were like him. Yet she considered it as her cross which she should carry with thanksgiving and she put her hope in Almighty God. Finally she was able to win her husband and he became a Christian. In her hope in God and His love to save sinners, she used to encourage other women who had husbands like her's.

After the death of her husband, her son Augustine deviated badly. She went to the Bishop of her city, Hippo and asking him to give some advice to her son. The Bishop declined because it was useless for him to deal with someone who leaned on his mind and his intelligence, such as Augustine.

Augustine left Hippo in North Africa and travelled to Rome to seek fame. She begged him to stay near her but he refused, and it appeared that there was no hope in his salvation after he had

lived a very sinful life.

For twenty years Monica did not lose hope and kept praying for him with tears - as she followed him from one city to the other - asking him without grumbling or despair to leave the life of sin. Finally her hope was realized and her prayers and tears brought forth their fruits. He accepted the faith and was baptized at the hands of Ambrose, the great Bishop of Milan. She went to Milan to attend his baptism and she rejoiced triumphantly.

After his baptism they set out to return to Africa and the desire of her heart was to die. Five days later she fell ill and died at the port of Ostia on the Tiber, at the age of fifty six.

In talking to God, Augustine speaks about his mother and says: "My pious mother had spoken and as I perceive, her voice was the echo of Your voice. She used to insist that I give up the harlots and all kinds of impurity, and I did not listen to her in the least, and cared not of what she said, as these were the words of a woman, while they came from You. My disrespect for her was disrespect for You, and my disregard for her was disregard for your words. My mother used to weep in a way which surpassed the weeping of women who lost their sons by death. Lord, you listened to her and the tears which she shed in her prayers are still in your hands. She used to wet the face of the earth with her tears".

2 - The Late Mr. Gindy Fam:

This man was a contemporary righteous man. He worked as a chief of a railways station in Egypt and he died around 1970. As I used to complain from digestion in my stomach he told me: "I used to have pains in my stomach, even from drinking water, but after St. Georges put his hands inside me, all these pains disappeared". So I asked him to tell me the story of this miracle.

He had a abscess in his liver and that was around 1925. The doctors agreed that the only way to cure him is by a medical operation. Yet at that time the rate of success of such an operation was one in a thousand and as a result he refused to have the operation done to him.

On a Sunday morning he had great pains and was unable to get up and go to church and he was expected to preach in the church that day. As he was very tired he gave up the idea of going to the church and fell asleep. He saw in a dream a man dressed in white like the doctors in the operating rooms. The man told him: "Get up it is Sunday and you should go to church". Mr. Fam answered: "I am sick and unable to get up". The man responded: "A sick person should go to the doctor to be cured and then go to church". Mr. Fam answered: "I went to many doctors who said that an operation is necessary". The man replied: "You should have the operation then". **Mr. Fam replied: "If God is unable to make the operation for me, I go to the doctors, but if He is able to make the operation for me, I shall never go to the doctors". The man asked: "You insist?", he answered: "Yes".**

Mr. Fam continues: "Then the man who looked like a doctor put his hands in my belly from

the right side near the liver and as if he undid a zipper, took the liver out and eliminated the abscess. After he finished this operation, he worked on my belly and then as if he did the zipper again. At this moment I woke up without any pains". Mr. Fam was also cured from troubles in his stomach. **The man in a white dress was none other than the Martyr St. Georges who made the operation and eliminated the abscess in a miraculous way.**