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Hope

Welcome and Presentation

Prayer: Ps 42:1-5

1 As a doe longs for running streams, so longs my soul for you, my God.

2 My soul thirsts for God, the God of life; when shall I go to see the face of God?

3 I have no food but tears, day and night; and all day long men say to me, "Where is your God?"

4 I remember, and my soul melts within me: I am on my way to the wonderful Tent, to the house of God, among cries of joy and praise and an exultant throng.

5 Why so downcast, my soul, why do you sigh within me? Put your hope in God: I shall praise him yet, my saviour, my God

Song: O divine Redeemer

1) The Jewish Tradition and Hope

Ez 37:11-12+14

11 Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off.'

12 Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves, (...)

14 And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live.

“See you next year in Jerusalem”: this is the traditional greeting among Jews when they leave each other. If we compare the three sister religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam, we can say that Islam enhances faith, Christianity love and Judaism hope. Of course it is a simplification because each of them cherish these three virtues, but it tells also something important about the special identity of each of the sister religions and shows us how they are complementary. It is evident how much hope is a recurrent theme in Jewish history. The bible tells us of the continuous acts of separation and of reconciliation between God and his people. There are times of deep faith and devotion, then there are times of disobedience and anger, there are also times of punishment, of suffering and deportation. Then there are times of contrition and repentance, of forgiveness and reconciliation. But through this long history of the Jewish people there is the continuous link of hope which

remains even when it is not evident on the surface. Whatever the conditions are, hope remains as a certitude that things will be better, that God will forgive and rescue us.

The persecution of the Jews is a long story which has brought a lot of suffering. Our responsibility as Christians is evident in this willingly inflicted harm to a group of people identified by their religious practice. Jews were accused of having killed our Savior but in fact we, as Christians, did not want to understand that Jesus has been killed by our arrogance in refusing to listen to him and to accept to repent. The Pharisees and Sadducees have been the killers of Jesus not because they were Jews but because they were the power who resisted the truth. And this reality concerns still our reality of the present day as Christians and the reality of our Church today as much as it did concern the Jewish tradition at that time. This sharp opposition remains throughout the centuries; it is an opposition between truth and false human power, and not between Jews and Christians. Power is in fact the contrary of hope.

Today, in our own life, we recognize these ups and downs of being near to God or of getting away from him. But, as it did for the Jewish people throughout history, this tenuous thread of hope remains throughout our own life: through any time of suffering we might endure, through our lack of concentration, through our attraction for illusions, and also through our capacity to suddenly repent and come back to our Source. Hope is our link with life, with the true energy which keeps us really alive. Hope in this sense is perseverance and resistance to destructive forces working on us.

Time of personal recollection:

Where has hope been the key to persevering with something in your life?

Sharing

2) Hope and meaning

Rm 5:3-5

3 We can boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering brings patience, as we know, 4 and patience brings perseverance, and perseverance brings hope, 5 and this hope is not deceptive, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.

Hope is our strength when things seem to go wrong. When we are suffering but nevertheless keeping hope, we seem to see another picture than the one of the first and most evident appearances. It is as if we would see behind the screen another reality, another meaning. Life is not only what it appears to be. The true Reality is the one which remains hidden or at least which needs to be deciphered behind the rough aspect it can appear to have. Did you ever experience having a strong headache but nevertheless remaining astonishingly happy and peaceful? As if beyond the agitation of the waves were something undisturbed and firm.

How do we decipher this deeper meaning? How do we catch this thread of continuity when everything seems to be broken? There is a mystery and a grace in this ability to remain anchored in hope when the tempest is blowing. God is always present and near us. Sometimes we stop looking at him and we do not see him anymore, but he remains in us. When we remain convinced of his presence despite the upheavals, because we learnt slowly and sometimes painfully to recognise him, it changes fundamentally our perspective on life. Life keeps having a true meaning despite the waves which disturb its surface. It does not mean that it puts an end to our suffering but the whole

picture becomes our hope, because we know it is the core of the truth, beyond appearances. Then we may discern the true orientation, the true law of evolution in Creation, which harmonies apparently contradictory aspects of life. In this sense hope is true understanding.

Time of personal recollection:

How has hope helped you to come to a truer understanding of a situation?

Sharing

3) Hope and potentials

1 Jn 4:1-6,

1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God,

3 and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already.

4 Little children, you are of God, and have overcome them; for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

5 They are of the world, therefore what they say is of the world, and the world listens to them.

6 We are of God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and he who is not of God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Eph 1:17-20

17 May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a spirit of wisdom and perception of what is revealed, to bring you to the full knowledge of him.

18 May he enlighten the eyes of your mind so that you can see what hope his call holds for you, what rich glories he has promised the saints will inherit

19 and how infinitely great is the power that he has exercised for us believers. This you can tell from the strength of his power

20 at work in Christ, when he used it to raise him from the dead.

Hope can read the true meaning of life and perceive the orientation of the Creation. It can also be a creative force which gives a form to what has yet no shape. Hope can see potentials. It is a capacity to distinguish which are the really life bringing energies. Our society believes in power, in profit and in appearances; the energies which aim at these kinds of objectives are distorted or at least wrongly oriented. Humility, tenderness, kindness, acceptance, love are truly creative energies which allow real life to find expression. Hope is certainly also our capacity to recognise these true energies where they are, even when there are not so evidently present. We need a special eye to recognise these true ways. The Pharisees did not recognise Jesus because they were attached to their own power and because Jesus did not come as the Messiah they were waiting for. It is in this sense that hope gives the right vision to recognise the real energy of life: it opens our "Pharisee eyes" to the real truth of the humble presence of God among us, not in an impressive, but in a very discrete way. Hope is the ability to recognise Jesus as he is, to build our life on him as the key stone and to trust him to lead us, because we can recognise he is the source of life, although he appears to us in a humble way. It means to give our life out into his hands, to trust that humility, forgiveness, love and generosity are the basic energies and the creative potentials in our life, and not our striving for

success, power and influence. Hope is, in this sense, pure clear-sightedness. It shuts the door to illusory energies and opens the door to the true force of life. In this sense hope is creation.

Time of personal recollection:

What are my “eyes of a Pharisee?” When am I tempted to use them? Are hope and creativity connected for you?

Sharing

4) Hope and expectation

Rev 7:9-17

9 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,

10 and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!"

11 And all the angels stood round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God,

12 saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen."

13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and whence have they come?"

14 I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

15 Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night within his temple; and he who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presence.

16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.

17 For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

We have described hope as perseverance, as understanding and as creation. We can also say that hope is expectation. This is certainly the first conventional understanding of the word: hope is commonly understood as expectation of a better future. But for Christians, hope understood as expectation is a kind of challenging paradox between the sense of what is already given and the sense of what has still to be accomplished. On the one hand, salvation is given, God is in us, peace is given, the Holy Spirit is guiding us every day. We are living in God's peace and we are trusting his love to lead us on our path. What more could we expect? On the other hand, Jesus has promised to come back for the accomplishment of his reign on earth. We are in expectation for this accomplishment. In what way does this expectation of the final accomplishment differ from the expectation of the coming of the Messiah? What did the coming of Jesus change in our way of expecting this last day for the establishment of his reign?

The meaning of hope as an understanding of the true sense of life and as a force of creation shows us the transforming reality of God's presence in our life. But the expectation of the last day means that something is still missing. God is reigning over the whole universe but, nevertheless, suffering remains on earth. Creation is certainly moving towards perfection, its harmony is the law of life, but nevertheless many people do not have access to this deeper dimension of life. The coming of Jesus

will allow all beings to experience peace and justice, not the human justice but God's truth and the experience of his love. As we have already been saved, what does it mean in relationship with this expectation of the last day? Do we have as saved creatures a role to play in the coming of the last day? Are our expectation and our hope active forces, creative forces, or only a form of passive patience that it will happen one day? If hope is a creative energy, it should be also an acting force to participate in the accomplishment of the last day.

Time of personal recollection:

How does hope in the return of Christ, in this paradox between what is already given and what has still to come, affect my life?

Sharing

Romans 15:13

Now may the God of Hope make you full of joy and peace through faith, so that all hope may be yours in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Song: Only in God.... (based on psalm #62)