

Opening Rite of the Jubilee Year December 28, 2024 - Fr. Charles Rowe

Earlier this year, I observed my silver anniversary of ordination, 25 years of service as a priest. It was an occasion to reflect on what had happened in the intervening quarter century. Way back in the previous millennium, the future was shining bright in my youthful eyes. Much was happening in the church and world to cause optimism. The World Youth Day in Denver a few years before generated great enthusiasm in the Church in America. The economy was strong. The collapse of the Soviet Union liberated millions from atheistic communism. Pundits thought world peace would break out. But then, stuff happened. The terrorist attacks on 9/11 destroyed the World Trade Center and killed 3000 people. Lengthy bloody wars ensued in Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2002, abuse scandals in the Archdiocese of Boston provoked a heart-wrenching reckoning for the dreadful sins of the recent past. There was a great recession in 2008, a pandemic in 2020, deaths in my immediate family—these 25 years profoundly affected my outlook. My viewpoint at the outset of Jubilee Year 2025 is less jubilant than it was in Jubilee Year 2000. Maybe the recent past has made you a bit pessimistic as well. Providentially, the theme of this year's jubilee is HOPE. The letter about the Jubilee is entitled *Spes non confundit*, that means, Hope does not disappoint. The pope speaks of jubilee participants as pilgrims of hope. So I wish to preach on hope, where hope comes from and what we hope for and how we can grow in hope.

The gospel for the feast of the holy family helps us understand how to be pilgrims of hope. Mary and Joseph were on a kind of pilgrimage, hoping to find their lost child Jesus. It is noteworthy that Mary and Joseph suffered great anxiety; their distress mirrors that of contemporary disciples unsettled by the recent past and uncertain about what lies ahead. Please note the story of the finding of Christ in the Temple foreshadows the Paschal event. The boy Jesus goes missing in the context of Passover, the same feast where Jesus will later offer his life on the cross. Mary and Joseph find Jesus on the third day of their search; on the third day after his death the risen Jesus would appear to his disciples. Mary and Joseph find Jesus in the Temple. The disciples would encounter the risen Lord in the new Temple that is the assembly of believers, most especially where the Word is proclaimed and the bread is broken, that is, the Eucharist.

As pilgrims of hope, we seek Jesus. Jesus is our hope. Jesus fulfills the hopes of the human heart. Jesus, God's only Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, crucified and risen, now reigning in glory at the Father's right hand. Jesus Christ, our Lord Redeemer and Savior, has promised to be with us always and has assured us a place in the Father's house. Our faith in Jesus is the basis of our hope: we hope in Jesus, we hope to be with Jesus, and as pilgrims of hope we seek Jesus.

Not only is Jesus the object of our hope, the goal of our quest. Jesus is also the source of our hope, its inspiration and wellspring. Hope is, along with faith and charity, a theological virtue, that means, hope is a power infused in us by the Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead. In seeking Jesus, we rely not on our own human powers. Rather, our hope comes from God. So to grow in hope we must pray that the hope first poured into our souls at baptism be strengthened by the assistance of the Holy Spirit. And the assistance of the Spirit may most readily be found in his Temple that is the Church. As Joseph and Mary found the Christ child in the Temple, so we who seek Jesus today should look for him in the Temple of the Holy Spirit that is the Church where Jesus makes himself most fully present. In the Church, believers help one another along the path to heaven. In Church, we pilgrims of hope avail ourselves of the food for the journey that is granted in the sacraments. Holy Communion grants the fullness of grace for moving forward. Penance heals the wounds inflicted by sin. Anointing of the Sick strengthens souls weighed down by serious illness. In accord with the venerable tradition of our Church, the jubilee year is an opportune time to make pilgrimages, be it to a holy door in Rome or to a shrine closer to home. Pilgrimages express and reinforce hope; they remind us of the pilgrim nature of existence, that is, human life is neither a period of stasis nor a series of unconnected events; rather, our life is a journey whose destination lies beyond the grave, life is in fact a pilgrimage to God.

Finally, as pilgrims of hope we have a duty to proclaim our hope to others. Mary and Joseph told others how they found Jesus in the Temple; their story became part of the gospel that brought others to faith in Christ. My fellow disciples, we have to tell our story to others. Our Catholic faith impels us to share it with those who are hopeless: the poor and beaten-down, migrants and refugees, the chronically ill and the dying, the imprisoned and forgotten. There is particular need also to witness to hope to young people, for the youth of today suffer a crisis of hope. They face numerous problems: family breakdowns, economic and social instability, the perils of climate change, wars across the globe, pandemics, the risks inherent in new technologies like social media and artificial intelligence. The young today more than ever require the witness of faithful Catholics who hope in Christ and express this hope in their mutual love and service to those in need.

Every Eucharist is a celebration of hope in Christ, a proclamation of the death of the Lord until he returns in glory. Whatever tomorrow may bring, even if it be the loss of our lives in this world, nothing can destroy our hope, for nothing can separate us from the love in God in Christ Jesus our Lord. May the grace of holy communion revive our hope and inspire us to move forward as pilgrims of hope on the way to our Father's house.