

SESSION 2 / THE DECISION TO HOPE

Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rm 5:3-5).

Theme Hope is a gift of God, but it is also a human act, a decision to trust God and rely on Him, especially in moments of anxiety, when the absence of God is felt. These are opportunities to grow in hope.

Welcome: We Pray and Share Together (15 mins)

O God,
send forth your Holy Spirit
into our hearts that we might perceive,
into our minds that we might remember,
into our souls that we might meditate.
Inspire us to speak with love, holiness,
tenderness and mercy.
Teach, guide and direct our thoughts and senses
from beginning to end.
May your grace help us to see with your eyes
and to act with your love and light in our hearts.
May we be strengthened with wisdom from on high
for the sake and glory of your kingdom.
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

In a period of calm and a space of trust, each one of us is invited to share briefly one thing that has happened in the past week. It could be one thing that has given you cause for concern, something shared during the last time you met as a group or something that has given you cause to celebrate.

In this moment of peace and fellowship, we pray for the good of the group. Each member is invited to offer up any personal intentions. We also pray for the good of the Church, for wisdom in our country and for the common good. Let us also bring to mind the poor, the sick and those who have died.

We join together in praying: Our Father...

Read the Word Luke 2:41-51 (5 mins)

Note: Luke's account of the finding in the Temple is the only Gospel passage to depict Jesus as a teenager. It is an event of 'joy mixed with drama' (St John Paul II, Rosarium Virginis Mariae, 20), where the hope of Mary and Joseph, experienced in anxiety, is fulfilled in the joyful finding of Jesus.

A variety of short prayers before the reading of Scripture can be found on page 46.

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

Meditate on the Word Luke 2:41-51 (20 mins)

Once the Scripture passage has been read you are asked to choose a word or phrase that has struck you. Underline it with a pen or you might wish to simply hold it in mind. You will be invited to share the word or phrase with the group.

Another person will then read the passage. While you listen attentively, repeat the process of holding onto a word or phrase, making a note and sharing it. In doing this, you are invited to consider the following questions:

How have these words or phrases resonated in my heart and in my mind?

What is the Lord saying to me at this very moment in my life?

In what way has my reading of this passage of Holy Scripture changed me?

How has it helped me to resolve to be more Christ-like in the coming days?

You are encouraged to re-read the Holy Scripture during the coming week, revisiting these questions.

Explore and Reflect on the Theme (25 mins)

Why did the 12-year-old Jesus stay in Jerusalem without telling his parents, causing them unspeakable distress during three days of frantic search? This mystery reveals to us that not even Mary and Joseph were spared the experience of the absence of God, of the pain of searching for Jesus, their own Son placed under their care by the Father.

On finding Him, Mary His Mother says: 'Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.' In the original Greek, the word for 'great distress' can also be translated as 'pain', physical or mental, 'acute suffering', 'grief', or 'torment'. Indeed, losing Him must have been, for them, an experience of unimaginable anxiety.

Without denying or understating the permanent feeling of distress they experienced during the three awful days, their action – *what they chose to do* – reveals to us their hope. They chose to search for Him and did not give up. They kept going, in hope of finding Him. In distress, and whether they felt hopeful or not, they hoped because they acted, and moved forward until who they hoped for – Jesus – was found. Hope, then, is not a feeling, but a *decision* that can be made even while experiencing the worst feelings of pain and anxiety. Hope is the decision to act by moving forward, placing our total trust in God.

In their situation, Mary and Joseph could have been tempted to fall into the two attitudes which are contrary to hope and destroy it: despair and presumption. In despair, they could have given up the search, thinking it was impossible for them to find Jesus. In presumption, they could have decided that everything would turn out fine without even looking for Jesus, relinquishing their responsibility.

The three days search of Mary and Joseph is an image of our own pilgrimage of hope in this life. In hope, we are called to keep going, to keep searching for Jesus, to keep walking each day, one step at a time, until we find Him, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in the Father's house. We are called, each day, to make decisions of hope, even in the midst of suffering and anxiety, even when we experience the darkness of the apparent absence of God.

The temptations to despair and presumption are a constant threat to us. We can despair by deciding that God's call of holiness is not for us, and that the happiness He wants us to enjoy in Him is beyond our reach. We can also presume by deciding that we will obtain from God all the happiness we want without searching for Him and striving to do His will. Both despair and presumption place us in a state of spiritual paralysis, putting an end to our pilgrimage to God, making it to be impossible or useless.

What does the decision to hope look like for us? It is the decision, every day, to trust God, to follow Jesus intimately in prayer, to receive faithfully the grace He gives us through His Church, in His Word and Sacraments, and to strive to live according to His commandment of love. It is the decision to return to Him every time we fall away through sin, no matter how often we have to do it. It is the decision to keep going in our relationship with Him even in the midst of pain, suffering and anxiety, until we are united forever to Him in Heaven.

Responding to what has been heard

By committing ourselves to action we are saying that we want to make a difference in our lives and in the lives of others. We are committing to make hope resonate in our lives. What have you heard today that you find challenging? What do you find affirming? What are you going to do about what you have heard today?

Go in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord (10 mins)

You are invited to close with a time of meditation on Psalm 62 (61). Read it slowly, pause between verses, reflect on its meaning for your life and your journey in faith, hope and love. You may also wish to conclude with the Lord's Prayer, another prayer of your own choosing or a moment of silence.

A: In God alone is my soul at rest;
my salvation comes from him.
He alone is my rock, my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not greatly falter.

B: In God alone be at rest, my soul,
for my hope is from him.
He alone is my rock, my salvation,
my fortress; never shall I falter.

A: In God is my salvation and glory, my rock of strength;
in God is my refuge.
Trust him at all times, O people.
Pour out your hearts before him.

B: Do not put your trust in oppression,
nor vain hopes on plunder.
Even if riches increase,
set not your heart on them.

A: For God has said only one thing;
only two have I heard:
that to God alone belongs power,
and to you, Lord, merciful love;
and that you repay each one
according to his deeds.

All: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

A blessing taken from the Liturgy of the Hours is included here.

May the Lord bless us and keep us from all evil
and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Hope is the decision to trust God even in anxiety

My God, I believe most firmly that You watch over all who hope in You, and that we can want for nothing when we rely upon You in all things. Therefore I am resolved for the future...to cast all my cares upon You.

st Claude de la Colombiere

He Who tests our hearts wishes us to win crowns of righteousness after long and protracted trial. Only let our spirit be kept unbroken, the firmness of our faith in Christ be maintained unshaken, and ere long our Champion will appear; He will come and will not tarry. Expect tribulation after tribulation, hope upon hope; yet a little while; yet a little while. Thus the Holy Ghost knows how to comfort His nurslings by a promise of the future. After tribulations comes hope, and what we are hoping for is not far off, for let a man name the whole of human life, it is but a tiny interval compared with the endless age which is laid up in our hopes.

St Basil of Caesarea

Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you. All things are passing away: God never changes. Patience obtains all things. Whoever has God lacks nothing; God alone suffices.

St Teresa of Avila

O Lord our God, under the shadow of Your wings let us hope, defend us, and carry us. You will carry us both when little, and even to grey hairs will You carry us; for our firmness, when it is Thou, then is it firmness; but when it is our own, then it is infirmity.

St Augustine



Meditate on Sacred Art: Visio Divina (2)

Describe what you see. Which exact moment does the artwork capture?

What do the bodily attitudes of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus portray? What do they tell us about human emotions and the choice to trust God in hope?

Why is trusting in God difficult in times of incomprehension, distress, and anxiety?

Remember an anxious time in your life and ponder on it in light of Christian hope.

Christ Discovered in the Temple (1342) by Simone Martini