

INTRODUCTION



“How much trust and hope are needed in our day!”

When Pope Francis said this in 2014, he was speaking particularly of the Middle East, but his words are equally applicable to so many situations today.

When the world is too much with us, when the news is depressing, when our families are fractured, when work is endless, when all prospects look bleak, that, says Pope Francis, is when we need to pay careful attention to *hope*, the fundamental virtue that informs who we are as Catholic Christians.

As always, the pope’s message is clear and strong: “Christians are not prophets of doom.” And reflecting on the gospel message is where we find the strength to be joyful in hope.

Here are thirty days of reflections based on Pope Francis’ words on hope. May they comfort and strengthen you so that you may become a hope-filled prophet of joy!

The quotes from Pope Francis were chosen by Deborah McCann, who also wrote the reflections and the “Ponder” and “Pray” pieces.

Cover photo: M.MIGLIORATO/CPP/CIRIC

Copyright © 2017 Twenty-Third Publications, a division of Bayard; One Montauk Avenue, New London, CT 06320. 860-437-3012 or 800-321-0411, www.twentythirdpublications.com. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any manner without prior written permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.

ISBN 978-1-62785-258-6 ■ Printed in the U.S.A.

1 | LOOKING BEYOND THE NOW

They who proclaim the hope of Jesus carry joy, and they see a great distance because they know how to see beyond evil and beyond their problems.

I'm sure many of us are familiar with the phrase, "Been down so long it looks like up to me." Especially in times of personal or national or spiritual darkness, hope can be a very elusive virtue. We know faith is a gift, and we have guidelines for how to model charity, but hope can escape us. Pope Francis tells us not to worry. We are not meant to be prophets of doom but people who can see beyond the current situation to trust in the plans God has in mind. If we pause to consider God's hope in us, we may find hoping easier.

PONDER

Am I a hopeful person, or do I often fall into despondency?

PRAY

God of hope, remove any darkness that surrounds me, so that I may see you better!

2 | GOD IS WITH US

Jesus is always walking beside us, even in the darkest moments, and he will reveal his presence.

Pope Francis speaks of the disciples on the road to Emmaus as an example of how well Jesus understands our human propensities. The disciples are complaining that all their hopes are dashed with Jesus' death, that hope is lost, and that there's no sense in going on. What does Jesus do? First, says Pope Francis, he is patient. He listens, and then he begins to teach them, to remind them of how God has been working in history throughout all of time. In our darkest days and times, when we remember that God is present, then the light of hope can begin to shine in our hearts and help us to see.

PONDER

How often do I not see the forest of God's love for the trees of my own blindness?

PRAY

God of hope, walk with me and open my eyes to joy!

3 | NOURISHING THE ROOTS OF HOPE

*Hope is a gift from God. We must ask for it,
so that its light may shine on our darkness.*

“There is no corner of our heart that cannot be touched by God’s love,” says Pope Francis. Those are pretty encouraging words! When we make mistakes, God is there, never wavering in love. If we open ourselves to trusting in God’s presence in our lives and in our world, we may begin to find the depths of hope buried within us and start to find the strength and conviction that comes from knowing that God is with us. This gift is already within us—we just have to help it grow.

PONDER

When was the last time I truly believed in God’s unconditional love for me?

PRAY

God of hope, help me to watch for you, listen for you, and find you in the smallest moments of every day!

4 | THE HUMILITY OF HOPE

*Hope is the humblest of virtues,
because it hides itself in this life.*

When circumstances and situations threaten to defeat us, when we have lost our bearings and wonder what sense there is in action of any kind, Pope Francis reminds us of the remarkably resilient power of hope. It's not something outside of us, he says, but it hides within our life. It is something we carry in us, and it's up to us to pray to have it revealed so that we can share it with others. This small flame can become a vibrant blaze if we permit ourselves to trust in how God is working in each of us. How confident can we let ourselves be?

PONDER

Have I ever considered that I carry the seeds of hope within me?

PRAY

God of hope, help me to find the hope that's in me, so that I may help it grow.