

## **THE JOY OF HOPE – SESSION 1 – DO NOT BE AFRAID**

Hope is vital to our everyday lives. Pope Benedict XVI says that *'the one who has hope lives differently because they have been granted the gift of new life!'*

The Catechism describes hope as *'the virtue by which we desire heaven as our happiness..it keeps us from discouragement, sustains us in times of abandonment and is the sure and steadfast anchor for the soul'.*

Many people today are often hope-less. What we are shown on the tiny Greek island of Patmos is the antidote to our modern day crisis of hope.

Patmos is one of the three most important New Testament locations on earth where God gave us all profound revelations of his Son.

At Bethlehem Jesus was revealed to us as God-made-man in the *Incarnation*. In Jerusalem we are shown the *Resurrected* Jesus bursting forth from the tomb. And it is in Patmos that we encounter the *Glorified* Christ (the Greeks call him - *Christos*).

Thank God for Saint John the beloved disciple or we would not have known this life-changing revelation. Tradition tells us that John as an old man was exiled to Patmos by the Romans for resisting anti-Christian laws in Ephesus.

He tells us in the Book of Revelation Chapter 1 that he was sitting in a cave on the Lord's Day with his assistant and scribe called Prochorus when suddenly he encountered the Glorified Christ, the Jesus of 'now'.

We will all spend eternity looking into this face of Christos that shines with love. According to Pope Francis, *'Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's Mercy'.*

What happens next in John's cave encounter is vital. Verse 17 tells us that John fell at the feet of Christos *'as if dead'*. But that was not the end of the story. John goes onto recount that the Glorified Christ knelt down and laid his right hand upon the old John and said *"do not be afraid, I am the Alpha and Omega"*.

John reveals to us all that Christ has not changed. He is still the loving, tender Jesus who walked amongst us 2000 years ago in the Holy Land.

One day we will all look upon Christ who will be *'the judge of the living and the dead'*. Through prayer and meditation on John's words given to us in the last book of the Bible, we can all now receive a personal 'revelation' of Christos.

If we are unsure of his tenderness and compassion, we will always fear one day 'meeting our maker.' We need to be confident every day that the Jesus now in Heaven has not become distant or out of our reach. This truth will fill our hearts with joy!

## **THE JOY OF HOPE – SESSION 2 – THE BEST IS YET TO COME**

Pope Francis says that hope is key and *'our very salvation depends on it.'* So how do we get more hope? The main way is to meditate on the biblical truth of Heaven.

Where in the Bible do we find faith-building verses about Heaven?

Jesus tells there *is* a Heaven but gives us only brief descriptions.

St Paul hints at having been to Heaven 'in the Spirit' but tells us little about it.

So thank God for old St John who shows us that *'the best really is yet to come!'*

The Book of Revelation is also called the Apocalypse, which means 'unveiling' like peeling back a curtain. Through John's description we see a door opened to Heaven.

The Church calls us to prayerfully look through this door often to build an inner joy; *'Heaven is the fulfilment of our deepest human longings..a state of supreme happiness..an ever-flowing wellspring of joy, peace and mutual communion'*.

St Niallus said *'If we could but taste the treasures of Heaven for one moment, how we would despise that which now dazzles and fascinates us'*.

St Paul challenged us to *'Let heaven fill your minds and hearts, don't spend time worrying about things down here'* (Colossians 3:2).

What will Heaven be like? Even with our human limits we see a tantalising vision; Pure sunlight from the Light of the World.

Total 'shalom', which means peace with God, others and ourselves.

The ultimate wedding party with the very best wine saved for us.

The Father's loving home where we at last will be 'whole-hearted'.

There will be no more sin, failure, fear, envy, pain, tears or depressing funerals.

We will be reunited with our loved ones in a totally redeemed community.

Many have such wrong ideas about Heaven like an endless boring church service.

But Scripture shows us a glimpse of the awesome Temple of God at the heart of Heaven where there is stunning beauty, electrifying worship, lightning and thunder, fire and water, myriads of mighty angels, fascinating creatures, and millions of saints who have gone before us in faith.

What difference does having a 'revelation' of Heaven make in our lives now?

1/ It breaks the fear of death, which is our last spiritual enemy (Hebrews 2:15).

2/ We will not grieve like those who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

3/ We will grow in freedom like St Paul in Philippians 1:21; *'To die is to gain'*.

4/ We will be motivated to 'store up our treasure in Heaven' with self-denial.

5/ We will begin to taste Heaven in the Eucharist where Heaven and earth now meet.

6/ And our latter years will be cheered by the promise of a final home-coming.

We must be confident of our destiny with the joy of the Good News in our hearts!

## THE JOY OF HOPE – SESSION 3 - HEAVEN ON EARTH

The Bible and the teaching of the churches clearly show us a vital and often neglected truth. The climax of human history is the amazing doctrine of the New Heavens and the New Earth.

In Revelation Chapter 21 we see the *'Throne of God in the New Jerusalem coming down to us, arriving like a beautiful bride for the marriage of heaven and earth'*.

Just like when God walked in the Garden of Eden, He will walk with us once again. God Almighty will change His address and will come to live on earth.

Luke in Acts, Paul and Peter all mention this future reality before John's final, glorious revelation given to us all from his cave on the island of Patmos. The Church tells us that this promise is our 'ultimate source of hope and joy'.

Our hearts cry out for an earthly restoration after death. We were created for this beautiful planet and for a physical, tangible eternal life. This always was and still is God's ultimate plan and destiny for humankind.

God didn't create this beautiful world as a temporary home for his beloved children and we are not simply passing through to a life in the clouds. This earth will one day be our *eternal* home – the Latin words for this are *Terra Nova* (new earth).

Our planet will be recycled and cleansed from every stain of sin, it will be creation in full bloom with new rocks, trees, plants and animals.

The Catechism reminds us that *'far from diminishing our concern for developing this earth, expectancy of a new earth should spur us on!'* This is the driving force behind Pope Francis' passionate call for us all to have an 'ecological conversion'.

And of course to enjoy this we will need new heavenly bodies. Jesus' resurrected body is a prototype for our own new upgraded spiritual bodies that await us.

St Augustine says that on that glorious day we will all be beautiful! And we will be ready at long last to reign with Christ for ever. We will 'tend His garden' faithfully and skilfully looking after the new earth and new cosmos.

To imagine our final heavenly home we don't need to look up at the clouds. All we have to do is look around us and imagine what all this will look like without sin, death, suffering and corruption.

When we see beauty everywhere around us in water, the wind, flowers, people and animals, we get a glimpse of a renewed earth in a renewed universe.

With this promise of Heaven on earth in our hearts and minds we can face whatever life throws at us with our heads held high and our hearts singing with hope-filled joy!

## **THE JOY OF HOPE – SESSION 4 – THE RIVER OF LIFE**

The Book of Revelation also gives us a vital perspective on eternity. Our time on earth is like a mere drop in the ocean compared with the eternal life that awaits us.

This eternal perspective effects how we approach life now and especially how we handle suffering. We all need help in life's tough challenges, we need a touch of heaven here on earth not pie in sky when we die!

Jesus' final promise to us all at the end of Chapter 22 is the answer to *all* of life's challenges. He promises us the *River of Life from the Throne*, now, here on earth: ***'Then he showed me the river whose waters give life, sparkling and crystal, flowing from the Throne of God and the Lamb.'***

The river described by John is the Holy Spirit and this great gift is for everyone: ***'Let everyone come who is thirsty, let them come. Take and drink the water of life without cost'.*** (R22:17)

St Paul reminds us that the Spirit is the answer to all our inner needs. He says that the fruit of the Spirit, the result of drinking from the river of life is; ***'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control'.*** (Gal 5:22)

Scripture describes the Spirit as our *Comforter, Helper, Defender and Empowerer* and the Catechism calls the Holy Spirit *'the Friend closest to our hearts'*. No wonder Pope Francis is always urging us to ***'invoke the Holy Spirit constantly'***.

The key to being filled with the Spirit is to know our need, our deep thirst like David the Psalmist: ***'My soul thirsts for you like a dry and weary land with no water' and 'As a deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, oh God.'***

At Pentecost the disciples were flooded with the River of Life and we all need a 'personal Pentecost experience' in our lives. Jesus invites us to experience the life of Heaven now so we can be ***'Like trees planted along the river bank, bearing fruit each season and their leaves never wither and they prosper in all they do'*** (Psalm 1)

Eternal life doesn't begin when we die, it starts in the here and now and we must drink of the heavenly river wherever we are, every day. We can do that in our armchair, walking the dog, sitting on a bus, in a hospital bed or a prison cell. Then the power of the Spirit will help us to 'practice for Heaven' by loving each other.

Let us pray: ***Father God, please fill us with a supernatural hope that will sustain us as we journey towards our breath-taking eternal reward and may we experience the gift of joy deep in our hearts. We declare with boldness that we believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.***

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