

Fostering Hope in a Troubled World

Hope can be an elusive quality to hang onto. Especially in troubling times. Some of us are prone to see the darker side of things and ignore the lighter side. Others are prone to see the good that surrounds them amid the corruption and evil.

St. Paul says Christians are blessed with faith, hope and charity; only charity abides into the next life. Yet it is hope, the way hope manifests here on earth that we need to cultivate.

Charles Dickens began his book *A Tale of Two Cities* on the French Revolution: "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." Does this make sense to the reader? The answer I propose is "Yes"; good and evil do co-exist, but what is a person to focus on?

One ditty gives the same message: "Two men looked out from prison bars . . . one saw mud; the other saw stars."

"Goodness Abounds!"

Most Rev. Doug Crosby, in his 2015 Christmas message as president of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, spoke about seeing hope amid the troubled world we live in. He titled his message: *Goodness abounds!*

He wrote, "This Christmas, as a counterpoint to the destructive forces of misery and terror that we have witnessed these past months, we must not forget that goodness abounds! More than not forgetting, let us be ready to point it out when we see it."

He wrote that this fall he was invited to join a small group of people who help at the *Out of the Cold* breakfast program in Hamilton. These good folk agreed to get up early every Thursday morning from November through March to prepare a hot breakfast for over 120 men and women.

As he helped at the various kitchen jobs, he said time passed quickly. He commented: "Even before I left, I knew that I had participated in something good, something beautiful, something sacred!"

Quiet and Unassuming Kindness

"The same thing happens every day in many communities in our country and around the world," he continued. "Terrorists may get front-page media coverage, but quiet unassuming goodness such as I experienced that morning wins hearts and souls! It won mine, and I know it won the guests. Goodness abounds!"

Christmas, he wrote, is a time to remember that in spite of the horrors of evil, goodness abounds. When we look for the goodness of others and allow the good in us to shine, God's compassionate mercy is revealed through simple, everyday kindness.

Focusing on Being Grateful

As I was finishing this article on the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, I heard an interview on CBC radio about gratitude. The lady explained how focusing on being grateful for the good things in her life had completely changed her life.

She used to be depressed and filled with self-pity. A counselor told her she needed to focus on the good things in her life. So she began to develop what she called a "gratitude radar." She began to write down at the end of the day three things that she could be grateful for. She was amazed how many things she had overlooked or ignored in her life – things that were positive and hopeful. Over time, her gratitude radar changed her way of looking at things – and it changed her life.

The Primacy of Grace

Being a hopeful person is more than being an optimist. I think of Mother Teresa who brought hope to many dying people in Calcutta and who inspired people around the world. Yet, after her death, it was revealed that she often suffered the dark night of the soul during her lifetime. She felt God was absent in her life and work. Hope was not an emotion she felt; rather, it was her faith that sustained her hope.

In his apostolic letter *Entering the New Millennium*, written in 2000, Pope John Paul II said that one of the seven pastoral priorities for the Church is to acknowledge the primacy of grace.

He writes: "If in the planning that awaits us we commit ourselves more confidently to a pastoral activity that gives personal and communal prayer its proper place, we shall be observing an essential principle of the Christian view of life: the primacy of grace. There is a temptation that perennially besets every spiritual journey and pastoral work: that of thinking that the results depend on our ability to act and to plan. God, of course, asks us really to cooperate with his grace, and therefore invites us to invest all our resources of intelligence and energy in serving the cause of the Kingdom. But it is fatal to forget that *without Christ we can do nothing.*"

Goodness Continues to Abound

Religious communities have been a major player in the short history of Canada. We have been involved in pastoral work, education and health care. Countless people have benefitted from and have been inspired by our work and example.

We live in changing times. Our numbers are diminishing. Others are taking up many of the works religious communities have started.

Our focus cannot be just on what is past history. God's grace continues to work through others. Goodness continues to abound.

Abbot Peter Novecosky, OSB