

The Best Is Yet to Come!

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For a little over ten years, I was extraordinary confessor at the provincial infirmary of a community of teaching brothers. Once a month, I visited about twenty ailing religious who lived there. I found myself in a wide-range of situations. For example, there would be very elderly brothers with advanced-stage cognitive losses and there would also be relatively young brothers suffering from degenerative diseases.

The Stalemate of Medical Conditions

That was precisely the case of Brother Yves, who was affected by a type of Parkinson's that was increasingly limiting his autonomy. One fall day when I went to his room, I found Brother Yves completely discouraged. In fact, his Parkinson's had progressed quite a bit over the course of the previous month and his doctor had advised him that he could expect his condition to continue to worsen.

I had before me someone who was desperate, who could not foresee anything other than a very dark future. What could I do with a man in such a state? What could I say? I found myself a bit overwhelmed. What pastoral attitude should I adopt? I could not say, "Don't worry, it'll be better tomorrow!" The unfortunate man had a degenerative disease and therefore his affliction would inevitably progress. As I sat face-to-face with him, I felt myself at a dead end.

The Hope Communicated by the Holy Scriptures

No doubt thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit, two biblical texts suddenly sprang to mind. First of all, there was this magnificent passage from Revelation in which John of Patmos intends to describe what life will be like in the new world of the resurrection:

"They will never hunger or thirst again; sun and scorching heat will never plague them, because the Lamb who is at the heart of the throne will be their shepherd and will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away all tears from their eyes." (Rev 7: 16-17)

Then, there was the passage in which St. Paul reassures the Christians of Thessalonica by writing to them that, when the Lord returns, they will be reunited with their deceased friends and family to enjoy eternal life with them:

"... do not grieve for them, as others do who have no hope....those who have died in Christ will be the first to rise; and only after that shall we who remain alive be taken up in the clouds, together with them, to meet the Lord in the air. This is the way we shall be with the Lord for ever." (I Th 4:13, 16-17)

Enlightened by these two testimonies from the Holy Scriptures, I have the audacity to say to the religious: "Brother Yves, do you realize that the most beautiful part is before you?" The brother stared at me with a questioning look. Was this some kind of joke? Do I really understand what is happening to him? This man did not see anything on the horizon but degeneration and the loss of his capabilities. So I went on: "Imagine what it will be like when you awake in the resurrection with a strong body and you will be able to frolic again

like a young spring colt! Imagine what it will be like when you can dance again and celebrate with your deceased loved ones that you have rejoined!”

Seeing Beyond the Human Predicament

It was then that I saw a large tear slowly trickle down Brother Yves’ cheek. Shaking my hand with all the energy he could still muster, he said: “Thank you, Father Michel. I was so wrapped up in my present sufferings that I had completely forgotten my future resurrection. My current situation made me blind to the hope that the resurrection of our Lord Jesus brings us.” Together, we had just overcome what seemed, from a human perspective, to be a dead end.

When I left his room, this religious had regained a deep peace, even if he knew that his health was still going to deteriorate. In effect, I had put him back in touch with what Pope Benedict XVI had called, in his encyclical *Spe Salvi*, our *great hope*. Essentially, I had invited this man to look through a longer lens and to perceive the hope of Life that awaits him beyond his period of illness.

The Benefit of Accompaniment

This meeting with Brother Yves was very instructive for me. It taught me how biblical scriptures can be bearers of hope when we find ourselves in situations where things seem at a dead end and hopeless. It also made me discover the importance of spiritual accompaniment and support.

I saw how suffering can obstruct our view and even make us forget what we know. In those cases, we need a brother or sister who can tell us: “The most beautiful is yet to come!” We need someone who can remind us of the hope that Christ raised by his resurrection and which animates the Church even today.

For Further Reflection:

How can we help the sick in our community keep in touch with the “great hope” of the Church?

What means can I give myself, starting now, to make sure that I do not lose sight of the hope of resurrection when setbacks occur?