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VATICAN - THE WORDS OF DOCTRINE by Rev Nicola Bux and Rev Salvatore Vitiello - Living faith as hope

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - Pope Benedict XVI in his Encyclical Spe salvi reflects on the nature of Christian hope in order to comprehend St Paul's statement that we are already redeemed. The theory is that “faith is hope ”. The Pope remarks that in the Bible “the words “faith” and “hope” seem interchangeable. Thus the Letter to the Hebrews closely links the “fullness of faith” (10:22) to “the confession of our hope without wavering” (10:23). Likewise, when the First Letter of Peter exhorts Christians to be always ready to give an answer concerning the logos—the meaning and the reason—of their hope (cf. 3:15), “hope” is equivalent to “faith”. (n 2).
The early Christians knew they possessed “ trustworthy hope ”, and they compared it with the life they had lived before conversion and the conduct of pagans who followed idols and superstitions, that is, as Paul tells the Ephesians, «without hope and without God in the world» (Eph 2,12). The most important thing is that hope is given in the encounter with Christ and therefore Christians need not «“grieve as others do who have no hope” (1 Th 4:13) instead they should realise that «a distinguishing mark of Christians is the fact that they have a future: it is not that they know the details of what awaits them, but they know in general terms that their life will not end in emptiness. Only when the future is certain as a positive reality does it become possible to live the present as well» (Spe salvi, ivi). So we understand that the proclamation of the Gospel brings about a change in the person's life and produces facts which help others to be saved: “The dark door of time, of the future, has been thrown open. The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life. ” (Ivi).
The Pope ask again, “in what does this hope consist which, as hope, is “redemption”?» (n 3). From comparison with paganism and with neo-paganism, it consists in knowing the one true God. We know this was the existential path of many men and women who became saints precisely because of the encounter with the true God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ as the Father. Truly moving is the example given by the Encyclical, a saint of our times, Josephine Bakhita a young African woman, who began to have «hope» after the encounter with Jesus, the one Lord. The Pope speaks of her experience of “great hope: “I am definitively loved and whatever happens to me—I am awaited by this Love. And so my life is good.” Through the knowledge of this hope she was “redeemed”, no longer a slave, but a free child of God.” (Ivi).
Those who have “faith as hope” feel compelled to share it with others: “the liberation that she had received through her encounter with the God of Jesus Christ, she felt she had to extend, it had to be handed on to others, to the greatest possible number of people. The hope born in her which had “redeemed” her she could not keep to herself; this hope had to reach many, to reach everybody.” (ivi).
Today little is said in catechism about the “theological” virtues, and therefore of hope, understood in this manner. This means that young Christians grow up without hope and are like everyone else in the world. They become insipid, good for nothing. The unfortunate moral slavery which distinguishes man in the world when he rejects the true God, is described by St Ambrose in these lapidary words: “ Those who reject the one Lord end up obeying many masters”. Instead, to be educated to have hope in God, means to believe in his promises, as Abraham believed: “"Hoping against hope, he believed, and thus became the father of many nations.""(Rom 4,18; cfr Catechism of the Catholic Church, n 1819). All this means living the faith as hope.
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