

'Spe Salvi' – Omne agens agit propter finem – Heaven, is it worth all the fuss...?



(A black sash in South America was a sign that a woman is with child.)

Mother of Hope

If Jesus is Life, Mary is the Mother of Life.
If Jesus is Hope, Mary is the Mother of Hope.
If Jesus is Peace, Mary is the Mother of Peace, Mother of the Prince of Peace.

SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD
HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II
Tuesday, 1 January 2002

I want to start with Mary Mother of Hope.

Mary is the Mother of Hope, because she contains *the substance of our hope, Jesus Christ, the Lord.*

I AM THE WAY

In the encyclical *Spe Salvi* Pope Benedict describes the “*present-day crisis of faith, essentially a crisis of Christian hope.*” (SS17)

Hope an emotion and a virtue: When the emotion of hope is present in our lives we are more likely to be “optimistic” and generally healthy and happy human beings. As a theological virtue, hope is truly the fountain of life. *Through, With, and In* hope we are able to receive good things from God who is love and give good things to others. This is done in a truly loving and complete way.

Generally speaking people who have hope, emotionally and theologically, are well equipped to deal with life. Life’s duties and difficulties are undertaken courageously; they have a good balanced about sin and its consequences; and they approach death with reverence and optimism.

For hope to be real it must have a substantial foundation. The substantial foundation of Christian Hope is the person of Jesus Christ.

“Faith is the *hypostasis* of things hoped for; the proof of things not seen”. (SS7)

Faith is the substance of our hope is Pope Benedict’s central point in the encyclical *Spe Salvi*...

“*Faith is the hypostasis of things hoped for; the proof of things not seen*”. *For the Fathers and for the theologians of the middle ages, it was clear that the Greek word hypostasis was to be rendered in Latin with the term substantia.*” (SS 7)

* Overhead of paragraph (SS 8)

Substance, in philosophy, is that element of an objective reality without which it would not exist, or what exists only by itself (*causa sui*).

Let us take a quantity of water and freeze it into ice. Substance theory maintains that there is a "substance" which is unchanged through this transition, which *is* both the liquid water and also the frozen ice. It maintains that the water is not *replaced* by the ice - it is the same "stuff," or substance. If this is true, then it must be the case that the wetness of water, the hardness of ice, are not essential to the underlying substance of water.

Substance can be used less technically in English to mean that which under pins a reality.

- the moral substance of a good character.
- the material substance of a person’s life.
- the spiritual substance of our Faith.

“*Substance*” is a theologically loaded word. Pope Benedict is using this word with all its corporal and spiritual implications. He affirms the human reality of “substance” but draws higher theological realities from the word, substance.

Jesus is the “*substance*” of our hope because He is the *Way, the Truth, and the life*.

To link hope to its true underlying reality Faith in the person of Jesus Pope Benedict uses the eleventh chapter of the *Letter to the Hebrews* where we find a kind of definition of faith which closely links this virtue with hope. (SS 7)

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”. (SS2)

The Latin translation of the text produced at the time of the early Church therefore reads: Est autem fides sperandarum substantia rerum, argumentum non apparentium—faith is the “substance” of things hoped for; the proof of things not seen. (Heb. 11:1)

Saint Thomas Aquinas, using the terminology of the philosophical tradition to which he belonged, explains it as follows: faith is a habitus, that is, a stable disposition of the spirit, through which eternal life takes root in us and reason is led to consent to what it does not see.

The concept of “substance” is therefore modified in the sense that through faith, in a tentative way, or as we might say “in embryo”—and thus according to the “substance”—there are already present in us the things that are hoped for: the whole, true life. (SS 7)

Jesus “tells us who man truly is and what a man must do in order to be truly human. He shows us the way, and this way is the truth. He himself is both the way and the truth, and therefore he is also the life which all of us are seeking. He also shows us the way beyond death; only someone able to do this is a true teacher of life.” (SS 6)

The “substance of our hope” is very important concept in our day when materialistic and secular life styles are held in such high esteem. The Gospel message has been relegated to that of purely private and other-worldly affairs - and has become somehow irrelevant for the “**real world**”.

From the encyclical I want to show three applications for the phrase “substance of our hope”.

1. First the application is the Good News as the substance of Life.

We must not overlook the link between these two types of “substance”, between means of support or material basis and the word of faith as the “basis”, the “substance” that endures. Faith gives life a new basis, a new foundation on which we can stand, one which relativizes the habitual foundation, the reliability of material income. (SS 8)

2. The second application is for all Christians that, the substance of our hope means more than just emotional or intellectual Christian hope or as Pope Benedict says; *hope is both informative and performative.*

To Luther, who was not particularly fond of the Letter to the Hebrews, the concept of “substance”, in the context of his view of faith, meant nothing. For this reason he understood the term hypostasis/substance not in the objective sense (of a reality present within us), but in the subjective sense, as an expression of an interior attitude, and so, naturally, he also had to understand the term argumentum as a disposition of the subject.

Faith is not merely a personal reaching out towards things to come that are still totally absent: it gives us something. It gives us even now something of the reality we are waiting for, and this present reality constitutes for us a “proof” of the things that are still unseen. Faith draws the future into the present, so that it is no longer simply a “not yet”. (SS 7)

3. The last application is that, the only genuine *substance* in reality which is able to build a better world is, Jesus. *I have come that you may have life. (Jn 10:10)*

In their case, the new “substance” has proved to be a genuine “substance”; from the hope of these people who have been touched by Christ, hope has arisen for others who were living in darkness and without hope. In their case, it has been demonstrated that this new life truly possesses and is “substance” that calls forth life for others. For us who contemplate these figures, their way of acting and living is de facto a “proof” that the things to come, the promise of Christ, are not only a reality that we await, but a real presence: he is truly the “philosopher” and the “shepherd” who shows us what life is and where it is to be found. (SS 8)

Pope Benedict firmly fixes hope in the reality of the human experience. Jesus did not come solely as a divine message; a good moral code, a life giving force. He came as a “person” (*hypostasis, substantia*) called Jesus of Nazareth.

Pope Benedict gives us two concrete human life examples in Spe Salvi; Bakhita, and the Vietnamese martyr Paul Le-Bao-Tinh. Both have suffered horribly in life but have overcome their sufferings by being given the genuine substance of hope, through, with, and in, Jesus Christ. This “substance” gave ultimate meaning to their lives and to their suffering.

Life is not a simple product of laws and the randomness of matter, but within everything and at the same time above everything, there is a personal will, there is a Spirit who in Jesus has revealed himself as Love. (SS 5)



Now Bakhita had “hope” —no longer simply the modest hope of finding masters who would be less cruel, but the great hope: “I am definitively loved and whatever happens to me—I am awaited by this Love. And so my life is good.



“I would like to quote a passage from a letter written by the Vietnamese martyr Paul Le-Bao-Tinh († 1857) which illustrates this transformation of suffering through the power of hope springing from faith.

I, Paul, in chains for the name of Christ, wish to relate to you the trials besetting me daily, in order that you may be inflamed with love for God and join with me in his praises, for his mercy is for ever (Ps 136 [135]). The prison here is a true image of everlasting Hell: to cruel tortures of every kind—shackles, iron chains, manacles—are added hatred, vengeance, calumnies, obscene speech, quarrels, evil acts, swearing, curses, as well as anguish and grief. But the God who once freed the three children from the fiery furnace is with me always; he has delivered me from these tribulations and made them sweet, for his mercy is for ever”. (SS 37)

Through our Faith and our hope we are able to have a living encounter with Jesus, “*Through Him, With Him and In Him*” every day. This encounter takes place by the solitude of person prayer, or in the community Eucharist.

*St Paul reminds the Ephesians that **before their encounter with Christ** they were “without hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). (SS2)*

For Catholics it is primarily in the Church that we find the reality of Jesus as *the substance of our hope*.

Today as in the past, this is what being baptized, becoming Christians, is all about: it is not just an act of socialization within the community, not simply a welcome into the Church. The parents expect more for the one to be baptized: they expect that faith, which includes the corporeal nature of the Church and her sacraments, will give life to their child—eternal life. Faith is the substance of hope. (SS 10)

*He shows us the way, and this way is the truth.
He himself is both the way and the truth,
and therefore he is also the life which all of us are seeking.
He also shows us the way beyond death;
only someone able to do this is a true teacher of life. (SS 6)*

Through the substance of His Word in the SCRIPTURES

In His substantial life giving SACRAMENTS,

And **with** His substantial truth in the ministerial TRADITION

The Word of God is a *reality* in our world; it changes people, the Word of God changes lives.

The person who receives the Sacraments *really* grows closer to God.

The teaching tradition of the Church *really* changes peoples conduct and hence communities.

Christianity was not only “good news”—the communication of a hitherto unknown content. In our language we would say: the Christian message was not only “informative” but “performative”. That means: the Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known—it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing. (SS 2)

I AM THE TRUTH

Jesus, who said that he had come so that we might have life and have it in its fullness, in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10), has also explained to us what “life” means: “this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (Jn 17:3)

Saint Thomas Aquinas explains how “truth” is able to move us to act.

That thing (*res*) which moves the will...

Now the first formal principle is universal "being" and "truth," which is the object of the intellect. And therefore by this kind of motion the intellect moves the will, as presenting its object to it. Summa Theologiae I-II, 9

Universal Being is not that hard a concept to understand. I generally use the example of Traffic Rules. Traffic rules makes motoring a pleasing and even life-giving experience. This only comes about because we all follow the same Road Code.

Who would drive a car if we did not have some hope that other drivers, on the whole, were obedient to the Road Code. Automobiles and travel would be a horrifying experience if this were not the case.

One code is given for the good of all users, that is true for all, and keeps life safe.



Bakhita heard that there is a “paron” above all masters, the Lord of all lords, and that this Lord is good, goodness in person. She came to know that this Lord even knew her, that he had created her—that he actually loved her.

In this talk I have been asked to discuss the youth today.

I believe young people are just as open to the truth as in past generations. They want to hear the Good News just as much as past generations. There are perhaps some differences from past generation as life is more complicated for our young people.

The true message of salvation the Good News needs ground for the Gospel seed to grow.

Thus, to hear the true Gospel message today the young possibly need to...

- **Stop - Look – Listen.** This is the beginning of any evangelization work with the youth. Often serious life changing words are hastily offered and just as hastily rejected.

- **Receive a simple truthful Christian message.** The Gospel needs to be offered simply and honestly to offset the propaganda our young people have been exposed.
- **A community approach.** Youth need good role models.
- **Unconditional Love** And finally all human beings need unconditional love...“You cannot love, what you do not know”

*They need the **certainty** which makes him/her say: “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38- 39).*

If this absolute love exists, with its absolute certainty, then—only then—is man “redeemed”, whatever should happen to him in his particular circumstances.

*This is what it means to say: **Jesus Christ has “redeemed” us.** Through **him** we have become certain of God, a God who is not a remote “first cause” of the world, because his only-begotten Son has become man and of him everyone can say: “**I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me**” (Gal 2:20).” (SS 26)*

The young need to know that Jesus is always the same. He alone waits, and rescues us. He never changes because He is substantially true.

A beautiful scene in The Passion of the Christ is when Jesus falls under the weight of the Cross and Mary kneels down to Him and Jesus turns to her and says...“Look Mother I renew all things. The young today need to know that in the Catholic Church Jesus is present and able to renew all things in their life no matter what we have done in the past.

Love never tiers of growing STRONGER LOVE.

Omnes agit agens propter bonum – “Every worker works for a good”

I AM THE LIFE



This innocent sufferer has attained the certitude of hope: there is a God, and God can create justice in a way that we cannot conceive, yet we can begin to grasp it through faith. Yes, there is a resurrection of the flesh. There is justice. There is an “undoing” of past suffering, a reparation that sets things aright.

For this reason, faith in the Last Judgement is first and foremost hope—the need for which was made abundantly clear in the upheavals of recent centuries.

Heaven : I want to start this part of my talk with a story of some priests gathered on a retreat. Having been asked the question, “What do you desire most of all?”

Their combined answer was;

to live, (Eternal life)
to have friends (Communion)
and to be happy. (Beatitude)

In chapter 10 Pope Benedict entertains the same three concepts of **eternal life – what is it?**

*Life: The term “eternal life” is intended to give a name to this known “unknown”. Inevitably it is an inadequate term that creates confusion. “Eternal”, in fact, suggests to us the idea of something interminable, and this frightens us; “life” makes us think of the life that we know and love and do not want to lose, even though very often it brings more toil than satisfaction, so that while on the one hand we desire it, on the other hand we do not want it. To imagine ourselves outside the temporality that imprisons us and in some way to sense that eternity is not an unending succession of days in the calendar, but something more like the supreme moment of satisfaction, in which totality embraces us and we embrace totality—this we can only attempt. It would be like plunging into the ocean of infinite love, a moment in which time—the before and after—no longer exists. We can only attempt to grasp the idea that such a moment is life in the full sense, a plunging ever anew into the vastness of being, in which we are simply overwhelmed with joy. This is how Jesus expresses it in Saint John's Gospel: **“I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you” (16:22)**. We must think along these lines if we want to understand the object of Christian hope, to understand what it is that our faith, our being with Christ, leads us to expect. (SS 10)*

*Community: Let us concentrate on the Letter to Proba in which Augustine tries to illustrate to some degree this “known unknown” that we seek. His point of departure is simply the expression “blessed life”. Then he quotes Psalm 144 [143]:15: “Blessed is the people whose God is the Lord.” And he continues: “In order to be numbered among this people and attain to ... everlasting life with God, ‘the end of the commandment is charity that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith’ (1 Tim 1:5).”¹¹ This real life, towards which we try to reach out again and again, is linked to **a lived union with a “people”**, and for each individual it can only be attained within this “we”. It presupposes that we escape from the prison of our “I”, because only in the openness of this universal subject does our gaze open out to the source of joy, to love itself—to God.*

*Happiness: Besides, what we call “life” in our everyday language is not real “life” at all. Saint Augustine, in the extended letter on prayer which he addressed to Proba, a wealthy Roman widow and mother of three consuls, once wrote this: ultimately we want only one thing—**“the blessed life”, the life which is simply life, simply “happiness”**.*

*No one lives alone. No one sins alone. No one is saved alone...
 Our hope is always essentially also hope for others;
 only thus is it truly hope for me too. (SS 48)*

Omne agit agens propter finem – “Every worker works for an end”

Fr. Andrew Matthew

This talk has been prepared for Holy Father's Day, Sunday, 12 October 2008.