



Catholic Social Thought and Hope

In times such as these, when we are battered by the multiple forces of the coronavirus pandemic, massive economic dislocation, widespread outrage over racist police brutality, and foreign and domestic efforts to undermine democratic institutions—even the right to vote—it is easy to lose sight of what we desire for society and how to get there. It is easy to lose hope.

So, as we work to make social, racial, immigration, and environmental justice central to this election cycle and contemplate, perhaps with trepidation, life and work for justice after the election, we would do well to reflect on a message of hope from Pope Francis. In one part of his recent address in Rome to Jesuits and colleagues working worldwide for social and ecological justice, Francis urged the participants to *open paths to hope*:¹

Our world needs transformations that protect life under threat and defend the weakest. We seek changes and many times we do not know what they should be, or we do not feel able to deal with them; they are beyond us.

At the borders of exclusion we run the risk of despair if we follow human logic alone. It is surprising that so often the victims of this world do not allow themselves to be overcome by the temptation to give in; rather, they trust and cling to hope.

We are all witnesses to the fact that “the lowly, the exploited, the poor and underprivileged” can and do achieve a lot... When the poor organize themselves they become genuine “social poets: creators of work, builders of housing, producers of food, above all for people left behind by the world market.”²

Does the social apostolate exist to solve problems? Yes, but above all to promote processes and to encourage hope. Processes that help people and communities to grow that lead to awareness of their rights, to deploy their skills and to create their own future.

May you work for “true Christian hope, which seeks the eschatological kingdom, [and which] always generates history.”³ Share your hope wherever you are, to encourage, console, comfort and revive. Please open the future, or, to use the expression of a current scholar, frequent the future.

Open the future, inspire possibilities, generate alternatives, help to think and act differently. Take care of your daily relationship with the risen and glorious Christ, and be workers of charity and sowers of hope. May you walk, singing and weeping, so that the struggles and concerns for the lives of the least and for threatened creation may not take away from you the joy of hope.⁴

It is with this divine gift of hope that we can continue to work without despair to transform our cities, states, country, and this battered world, even against the well-armed forces of exclusion and oppression. We speak of faith, hope, and love, but often ignore the transformative power of hope which Jesus described as planting seeds from which harvests can grow and people everywhere can find food for their bodies, minds, and spirits. As Pope Francis put it, we must learn from the least among us to “trust and cling to hope.”

ENDNOTES

- 1 Pope Francis. (7 November, 2019). Address to participants of the Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat Congress, Vatican. *Promotio Iustitiae*, No. 129, 2020/1, pp. 112-116, at 115, https://www.sjesjesuits.global/wp-content/uploads/PJ_129_ENG.pdf.
- 2 Pope Francis. (9 July, 2015). Address to Meeting of Popular Movements, Bolivia, 3.1.
- 3 Pope Francis. (2013). *Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel*, 181.
- 4 Pope Francis. (2015). *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, 244.