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John Gavin, S.J., *Editor*

Hope and the Gift of Time

By Margaret I. Hughes, Ph.D.

November 16, 2025—33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading: Mal 3.19; 2 Thess 3.7-12; Luke 21.5-19

It is a great gift to live in time. That we live in time means that we can also, by the grace of God, live in hope. The readings for this week and their situation in the liturgical calendar bring us to ponder this gift of time and the question – unique to human beings – of how we should live out our time in hope.

This Sunday is the last, but one, of the liturgical year. Next Sunday we will celebrate the triumphant feast of Christ the King, and then will begin the liturgical year anew by entering, once more, into the season of quiet expectation and waiting for the coming of Christ. Within the succession of time in the liturgical year we have an image of the succession of time of all of Creation. Although the liturgical year is cyclic, we know through Revelation, including the readings for today, that time comes to an end and culminates in the Second Coming of Christ. Each liturgical year through which we live reminds us that the succession of time in which we live is not meandering purposelessly, but rather that time is moving towards a goal. Each liturgical year reminds us to ask for the grace to live out our time in hope.

Hope is for the Future Good Even in the Face of Present Sorrows

At first glance, however, our readings for today may seem to be only a cause for fear, not for hope. The first reading begins with the promise of a day coming that will be like a blazing oven. The second is a reprimand for disorderly living. And the Gospel foretells war, famine, illness, persecution, and death. Hope is for something good, for something in which we may find real joy, and yet these things are causes of sorrow.

Sorrow is an aspect of hope. While hope is for something good and for something in which we can take real joy, hope is hope, and not yet full joy, because that good is not yet present. Hope is future-oriented. It looks towards an expected good. If that good is expected, however, we do not yet have the good that we desire. This entails that hope must be bound up with sorrow because the longed for good is not yet present. And, hope carries with it some fear because that deeply desired future good will be attained only with struggle and suffering.

Living in hope, therefore, requires first a future-oriented gaze. The very first words of the first reading point us to the future in this way: “Lo, the day is coming ...” Looking towards the future is possible only because we live in time. We can look towards the future because we have experienced the continuous succession of the future becoming the present and then the past. In the present, we can look towards the future with the expectation that the future will become present. Confidence that the future will one day be present is essential for hope.

But the words that follow in the first reading describing the future may fill us with dread, not hope: the coming day will be “blazing like an oven, when all the proud and all evildoers will be stubble.” When we hear these words, it is tempting to avert our eyes from the future and focus only on the present. Keeping in view the promise of what will come in the future makes living in the present too uncomfortable. Or, when we hear these words, it is tempting to avert our eyes from the present and focus only on the future evil in the misplaced hope that we might somehow control or change the coming of the end of time.

The Gospel, likewise, give us a fearful picture of the coming of the end. Jesus tells us what will happen as the Day of the Lord, the end of time as we know it, approaches. It is terrifying. There will be great human suffering. There will also be great suffering on account of being a Christian: persecution, betrayal, being hated, even death. With these words, Jesus removes any misapprehension that His followers, whether in the first century or the twenty-first century, may have about what it is to be a Christian; the coming of God made-man, the redemption of sins, and the living of the Christian life does not eliminate sorrow and suffering from the present or the immediate future. Since we know that time will come to a close in a blaze and that, before then, there will be suffering, to live in hope requires shouldering present sorrows.

Hope is Given in Time

Living in hope, looking forward to the future good while persevering through present sorrows, would be impossible if we lose sight of the gift of time. All gifts have givers, and the giver of time is God. Time has its origin in God’s creation of the world and in His creation of human beings who have the material capacity to be in time and the intellectual capacity to understand it. This understanding helps us to see that time is outside of our control and our deliberate construction. We do not choose to cause time; we find ourselves already caused in time. Time, therefore, is given to us. Our capacity for understanding, however, makes it possible for us to be aware both of time and the way in which it shapes our lives.

This is precisely what today’s readings present to us, and each does so in a way that gives us an image of hope that is fulfilled. As we listen to each, we live through the sorrows and fears that we will encounter on our way to the good for which we long, and so as we listen to each reading, we experience, albeit in a very small way, an image of what a whole life lived in hope is like.

While the first sentence of the first reading may fill us with dread, it is followed by a second sentence: “But for you who fear my name, says the Lord, there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays.” This sentence is a cause for great hope; it is addressed directly to us and it promises, in this day that is blazing like an oven, heat that is not destructive, but rather healing.

The Gospel also offers us an image of what it is to live in hope: Jesus lists all the many difficulties his followers will endure but ends with the statement “By your perseverance you will secure your lives.” As with the first reading, we are brought through fear and dread to the assurance of a future, final good, and so to rest. In this last statement from Jesus, we see that death is not the end. Even in death, and even through death, we will secure our lives. Life, not death, is our end.

If, when we hear Jesus’s words foretelling suffering and death, or when we are suffering these things ourselves, hope seems humanly impossible, we are correct. Natural hope, which is looking towards a good that is difficult but, on a natural level, possible to attain, is not enough to sustain us in the face of death. Left to our own devices, even if they are very advanced devices, death is final. Only God, who is most living and the source of all life, can overcome death. In this Gospel, He assures us that He will. Death – the most terrifying part of human

life, so terrifying that we often refuse to think about it, that we come up with euphemisms to talk about it, or even try to seize control of it by killing the elderly and sick under the false pretense of medicine – is not the end. It is a suffering, a grave difficulty, that we each must undergo but that difficulty is what makes our future good only difficult, but not impossible, to attain. God gives us, not only time, but also the further gift of hope that, despite the inevitability of suffering and death, our time can be ordered to the future good of living with Him forever.

Living in Hope Illuminates the Meaning of the Present

But, in the meanwhile, before we reach that future good, we must live in the present. In the present we continue to encounter calamity after calamity, heartache after heartache, or even the dull ache of boredom with the routine. The future, final good may seem very far removed from our present sufferings. And yet, it is in the present that we must live in hope.

The second reading – which, at first glance, seems oddly placed between the first reading and the Gospel – offers us a wonderfully direct instruction on how to live in hope: St. Paul writes, “we instruct and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and to eat their own food.” When we live each ordinary, run-of-the-mill day quietly and well, persevering to the end of the day so that we may look back on that day with gratitude, we have lived a small microcosm of our whole lives and of the history of Creation.

Such an ordinary, run-of-the-mill day is saturated with meaning because it is the present carrying us forward towards our future, final joy of the fullness of life with God. When we are attentive throughout such a day to our hope for that full life with God and live in a way that is fitting for someone who will be united to God, we have before us a sign that God is with us, even in the present. Our hope is for full and complete union with God; this is His desire, too. Seeing in the present the hope that He gives us reminds us that His life is in us even now, and so is the cause of an ever-deepening hope and a reminder to continue to ask Him for the grace to hope for the fullness of His life.

In our proclamation of the “Alleluia” this Sunday, we prayed “Stand erect and raise your heads, because your redemption is at hand.” We have here, in a few words, the kernel of our hope. We may hope because we are redeemed. No one can redeem himself; someone else must do it for us. And here is the cause of our hope: God has entered time and become man and redeemed us so that we may hope to live with Him. Our redemption, however, is not simply something that happened in the past, or that will happen in the future. Our redemption is at hand. It stretches from the past, into the present, and towards the future. That redemption has been accomplished in the Cross, but is also being accomplished now, in the present living out of our lives quietly in the everyday as we participate in the life of Christ and His Church, and will be accomplished in the completion and fullness of time. Christ is the King now, just as He will be at the end of time. We may look forward in hope to our feast next week, which is possible because God gives us the hope for it and the time in which to do so, just as we may look forward to the feast without end at the end of time.

Margaret I. Hughes is a tutor at Thomas Aquinas College, New England. Her most recent article is “The Healing Hope of Music,” published in Sacred Music, 151.3 (Fall 2024).

For Further Reading

Augustine of Hippo, [*Enchiridion: On Faith, Hope, and Love*](#)

Benedict XVI, [*Spe Salvi*](#)

Thomas Aquinas, [*Summa Theologica, IIaIIae, q. 17 – 22*](#)

In Short . . .

- *Hope is the expectation of a future good that is difficult, but possible to attain, which means that living in hope entails the sorrow of not yet possessing a deeply desired good.*
- *That we are dependent on God for time reminds us that we are dependent on God for hope and that living in hope requires asking for the grace to do so.*
- *Living in hope helps us to see the importance and meaning of the quiet, ordinary, and everyday present because it is an indication that God is with us, not only at the end of time, but even in the present.*