

HOPE

Neither Trump nor Putin, the true Messiah is someone else

CULTURE

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We live in interesting times, as the Chinese would say: wars everywhere, pandemics being handled strangely, a Church that seems to have forgotten its mission... All of this is worrying and frightening: what other catastrophe awaits us, and when? How can we

prepare to face it and overcome it? How can we have a glimmer of hope?

Hope is having faith that tomorrow will be better; that wars will cease; that life, including economic life, will return to normal; and that the wicked will be prevented from doing any more harm. We would give anything for a glimmer of hope, to be able to believe that a Messiah will come to save us, punish sinners and console the afflicted.

Many probably harboured the same hope in Jesus's time: oppressed, harassed, economically tormented and deprived of their freedom, they waited feverishly for the Messiah. Could it be this one? Or perhaps that one? But they were certain that a Messiah would come and liberate and redeem the people, bringing a period of peace and prosperity. They needed this hope as much as anything else.

Today, I see the same phenomenon. Could Trump be the Messiah who will imprison all the corrupt and depraved politicians? Will he bring freedom and prosperity? Are the wars he is starting — some of which seem absurd — perhaps a painful yet necessary part of a vast, sophisticated providential plan designed to save the planet from fear and poverty? Or could it be Putin, who will defeat a rotten and corrupt West? Or could it be some political party or coalition? Or will it be the *katéchon* devised by Pope Benedict XVI to flush out the enemies of the Church who have infiltrated its heart?

In any case, it is better to be prepared for the great change that awaits us.

Before the light, there is the darkness of the tunnel: a period of anguish and tribulation. So it is better to prepare: stockpile salt and soap, prepare candles, solar panels and diesel generators, and so on.

As I have said before, it is all understandable. We are in a period of crisis and anguish. The European Union is sinking and dragging us down with it. The West is increasingly revealing a piratical and ferocious face, which it took care to hide out of decency in previous decades. Many Catholics no longer trust the Church. It is understandable to harbour the hope that this dark reality will change and open up to a better future. However, I doubt that this attitude will lead to anything but more bitter and dramatic disappointments and an even fiercer and deeper despair.

Let us return to the time of Jesus. As we have said, many were awaiting an earthly Messiah who would bring administrative autonomy, economic relief and a measure of freedom.

Perhaps Judas was among them, too. Judas, wounded for having placed these hopes in Jesus, probably felt betrayed and deceived. He probably poured out his hatred not

upon himself and his own naïvety and simplicity, but upon Jesus himself. And he punished Jesus, wretch that he was.

Thus, the Jews passed from 'Hosanna' to 'Crucify him' in a matter of days.

This is because they did not have a Messiah like Trump or Putin, but a true Messiah who was humble and poor. He was betrayed, sold out, tried and condemned unjustly; imprisoned, tortured, humiliated and mocked; and finally crucified as the lowest and most despicable of criminals. He was the only man on earth who never committed a sin and had nothing but love for everyone.

He disappointed hope, but he gave hope. Not the hope that things might go a little better, but the hope of living eternally in paradise and seeing God. He was the Messiah we needed, but did not deserve.

Once again, we can draw a parallel with the present day. The Messiah? He has already come, and we are already saved. Hope? The theological virtue of hope does not consist in believing that things will get better or that a messiah will arrive to stop the villains. So what does the virtue of hope consist of? Let us consult the Catechism: "Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in the promises of Christ and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the Holy Spirit" (§1817). In other words, the theological virtue of hope does not consist of believing that 'everything will be all right' or 'we will come out of this better'; it consists of believing that we will go to heaven.

And what about prepping? Is there such a thing as Catholic prepping? Of course there is. 'Put on the full armour of God, so that you may be able to stand firm against the devil's schemes.' For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this dark world, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.' Therefore, take up the armour of God, so that you may be able to stand firm on the evil day, and stand after overcoming all trials. Stand firm, therefore, with your loins girded with truth, clothed with the breastplate of righteousness and with the gospel of peace ready to proclaim. Hold the shield of faith in your hands to extinguish the devil's flaming arrows; take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray without ceasing with all kinds of prayers and supplications in the Spirit. Keep watch with perseverance and pray for all the saints (Ephesians 6:11–18).

The Messiah himself has also instructed us elsewhere: 'Do not fear those who kill the body and after that can do nothing more' (Lk 12:4; Mt 10:28) and 'Watch, therefore,

for you do not know the day or the hour' (Mt 25:13). May this period of Holy Easter bring us a little more trust in the true Messiah and turn us away from false ones.