

SUNDAY CATECHISM / 17

The virtue of hope

ECCLESIA

27-03-2022

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In the last lesson, among the various points made, we saw what is the just attitude of mankind before God who reveals Himself and therefore what are the consequences of believing in the one true God. "Credo in unum Deum" includes **THE THREE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES**: faith, hope and charity and **THE VIRTUES OF RELIGION**, in particular worship and adoration.

To this discourse, a very important aspect of the **MESSAGE OF FATIMA** can be connected, that is the apparition of the Angel in 1916 which preceded that of the Madonna. On that occasion, the Angel taught the three little shepherds a prayer:

« My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love You! I beg pardon for those who do not believe, nor adore, nor hope, nor love You.»

We can intuit the profound meaning of this extraordinarily true prayer and its far-sightedness, as all the problems we are experiencing presently are connected to the failure to recognise the one true God and consequently to no longer obeying the first great commandment. What is missing in our time is precisely faith, hope, charity and adoration. And they are exactly the four acts that the Angel recommends and for which he asks for reparation.

We adhere to God through the intellect, which is not to be understood in a rationalistic sense, as faith leads to adhesion to God; we have in fact noted that the formal reason for faith is that God reveals and reveals Himself. We believe in everything that God reveals precisely because it is He who reveals it to us. We adhere to God with faith, the first Truth: it is on this first Veritas that the individual truths depend and are connected to each other.

TODAY WE CONTINUE TO CONSIDER THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUE OF HOPE. Hope also has God as its aim, as its destination. In this case there is an adherence to God under the aspect of eternal beatitude and inasmuch as God is the only one who can provide mankind with the means to reach this beatitude, as this happiness is beyond mankind's ability.

Mankind, while he is attracted and hopes in God as his beatitude, as the goal of his life, at the same time he also hopes in Him to receive the means that lead to this beatitude, in as much God is omnipotent, He is infinite goodness and everything is possible for Him that wants our good.

There are two questions of the Summa Theologiae, II-II, 17 and 18, which are dedicated

precisely to the theological virtue of Hope:

« Hope regards eternal happiness chiefly, and other things, for which we pray God, it regards secondarily and as referred to eternal happiness: just as faith regards God principally, and, secondarily, those things which are referred to God, as stated above». (Q. 17, art, 2, ad. 2)

So the focus of hope is **ETERNAL HAPPINESS**: everything else makes sense and must be put in order in as much as it leads to this bliss.

« A virtue is said to be theological from having God for the object to which it adheres. Now one may adhere to a thing in two ways: first, for its own sake; secondly, because something else is attained thereby. Accordingly charity makes us adhere to God for His own sake, uniting our minds to God by the emotion of love. On the other hand, hope and faith make man adhere to God as to a principle wherefrom certain things accrue to us. Now we derive from God both knowledge of truth and the attainment of perfect goodness. Accordingly faith makes us adhere to God, as the source whence we derive the knowledge of truth, since we believe that what God tells us is true: while hope makes us adhere to God, as the source whence we derive perfect goodness, i.e. in so far as, by hope, we trust to the Divine assistance for obtaining happiness. » (Art. 6)

In subsequent articles, St. Thomas puts all the theological virtues in order drawing a wonderful synthetic picture. In article 7, he wonders if hope precedes faith and concludes that **IT IS FAITH THAT PRECEDES HOPE**.

«The object of hope is a future good, arduous but possible to obtain. In order, therefore, that we may hope, it is necessary for the object of hope to be proposed to us as possible. Now the object of hope is, in one way, eternal happiness, and in another way, the Divine assistance, as explained above (Article 2; Article 6, ad 3): and both of these are proposed to us by faith, whereby we come to know that we are able to obtain eternal life, and that for this purpose the Divine assistance is ready for us, according to Heb. 11:6: "He that cometh to God, must believe that He is, and is a rewarder to them that seek Him." Therefore it is evident that faith precedes hope. » (Art. 7)

St. Thomas then asks himself whether charity also precedes hope; and here he concludes that while faith precedes hope, **CHARITY FOLLOWS HOPE**, but by making distinctions:

«In the order of generation, hope precedes charity. For just as a man is led to love God, through fear of being punished by Him for his sins, as Augustine states (In primam canon. Joan. Tract. ix), so too, hope leads to charity, in as much as a man through hoping to be rewarded by God, is encouraged to love God and obey His commandments. On the other hand, in the order of perfection charity naturally precedes hope, wherefore, with the advent

of charity, hope is made more perfect, because we hope chiefly in our friends. It is in this sense that Ambrose states (...) that charity flows from hope. » (Art. 8).

In the fourth article (again from question 17), Thomas wonders if one can legitimately hope in mankind. To answer this, it must be remembered that hope has two objectives, the happiness to which mankind aspires and the means with which this good can be achieved: **eternal happiness as the ultimate goal and God's prior help as the means that leads to this happiness.** Therefore Thomas concludes:

«Just as it is not lawful to hope for any good save happiness, as one's last end, but only as something referred to final happiness, so too, it is unlawful to hope in any man, or any creature, as though it were the first cause of movement towards happiness. It is, however, lawful to hope in a man or a creature as being the secondary and instrumental agent through whom one is helped to obtain any goods that are ordained to happiness. It is in this way that we turn to the saints, and that we ask men also for certain things.» (Art.4)

Whenever our hope leads us to something that is not God, whether as an ultimate end or as a means or prime cause, the theological hope is frustrated and a disordered act takes place.

A final remark is motivated by question 18, art. 4. St. Thomas wonders **if our hope, that is, that of those who are still on their way to salvation, has the CHARACTERISTIC OF CERTAINTY.**

«Hope does not trust chiefly in grace already received, but on God's omnipotence and mercy, whereby even he that has not grace, can obtain it, so as to come to eternal life. Now whoever has faith is certain of God's omnipotence and mercy. That some who have hope fail to happiness, is due to a fault of the free will in placing the obstacle of sin, but not to any deficiency in God's power or mercy, in which hope places its trust. Hence this does not prejudice the certainty of hope. » (Art. 4, ad 2-3)

Hope is therefore not founded on something we own, but on divine omnipotence and divine mercy. The certainty lies in God: that God can and that God wants to save mankind. Where is the uncertainty instead? The uncertainty lies not so much in our fragility, but in mankind's free will. But hope as such is certain, because God's help is certain and certain is His omnipotence to save us.