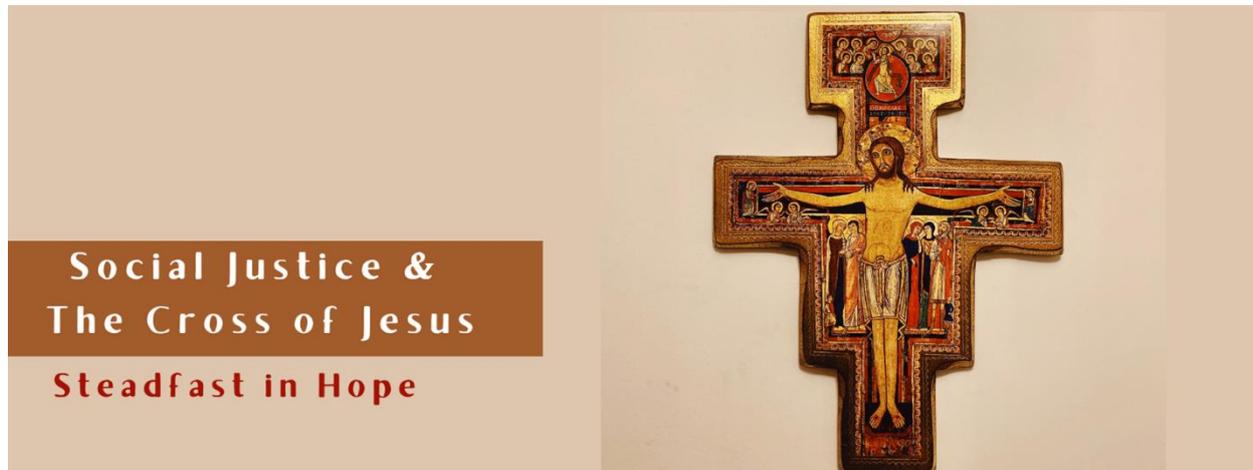


SOCIAL JUSTICE & THE CROSS OF JESUS  
*REFLECTION 5 – STEADFAST IN HOPE*  
*DEDICATED TO ABORIGINAL ELDER, UNCLE BEVAN COSTELLO*



*San Damiano Crucifix*

**HOPE**

Our calling by God is not only an individual call to hope and to be a person of hope, but also to be people of hope and a community of hope. The theological virtues of faith, hope and love are interconnected in our relationship with God.

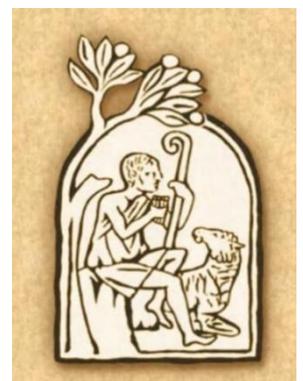
*In Reflections Two and Three, we explored the Letter to the Galatians and the First Letter to the Corinthians. In this Reflection we begin with the Catechism of the Catholic Church on the theological virtue of hope. Then we ponder what Saint Paul reveals about hope in the [First Letter to the Thessalonians](#), [The Second Letter to the Corinthians](#) and [the Letter to the Romans](#). During the Reflection we also follow special moments of conversion as St Paul’s understanding of hope deepened.*

*The biblical translation used is the [New Revised Standard Version NRSV](#). The separation of text into lines is my own.*

**1. The Catechism on the Theological Virtue of Hope**

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church we are taught:  
*‘Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ’s promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit.’ (1817)*

Four quotes from the New Testament are included below in the next section, 1820 from the *Catechism*.  
[\(Romans 5:5.; Hebrews 6:19-20; 1 Thessalonians 5:8; and Romans 12:12\)](#)



*Catechism of the Catholic Church*

*‘Christian hope unfolds from the beginning of Jesus’ preaching in the proclamation of the beatitudes. the beatitudes raise our hope toward heaven as the new Promised Land; they trace the path that leads through the trials that await the disciples of Jesus.*

*But through the merits of Jesus Christ and of his Passion,  
God keeps us in the "hope that does not disappoint."  
Hope is the "sure and steadfast anchor of the soul . . . that enters . . .  
where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf."  
Hope is also a weapon that protects us in the struggle of salvation:  
"Let us . . . put on the breastplate of faith and charity, and for a helmet the hope of salvation."  
It affords us joy even under trial: "Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation."  
Hope is expressed and nourished in prayer,  
especially in the Our Father, the summary of everything that hope leads us to desire.' (1820)*

## **2. The Thessalonian Community**

Saint Paul spoke of a community of hope in his first letter to the Thessalonian community.

*'We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers,  
constantly remembering before our God and Father  
your work of faith  
and labour of love  
and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*For we know, brothers and sisters  
beloved by God, that he has chosen you,  
because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only,  
but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction;  
just as you know what kind of people  
we proved to be among you for your sake.*

*And you became imitators of us and of the Lord,  
for in spite of persecution you received the word  
with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit,  
so that you became an example  
to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.'*

In spite of the trials and hardship of persecution that they suffered,  
they received the Good News of Jesus  
and became known for

- their work of faith
- their labour of love
- and their steadfastness of hope.

They experienced solidarity in the community with Paul and other visitors,  
and in turn, they strived to live that solidarity in each other.

We each have our own insights  
into the work of faith  
and labour of love as Christian communities.

***Yet what does it mean to be steadfast in hope?***

Let us listen to Saint Paul.

### **3. The Corinthian Community**

In St Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, despair and endurance, affliction and consolation, were raised by him.

Paul explained that **God**  
*'consoles us in all our affliction,  
so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction  
with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God.  
For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us,  
so also our consolation is abundant through Christ.'* (2 Corinthians 1:4-5)

Let us now take time to apply this Biblical passage to ourselves.  
We identify how God consoles us in our afflictions.  
We name those special moments of receiving from God.  
We identify, in solidarity with others, how  
we console others in their afflictions, with the consolations God showed us.  
We name these special moments of sharing.  
**[pause, pray and reflect]**

There was a solidarity between the wider Church communities where Paul ministered,  
and the Corinthian community.  
This solidarity shared both the sufferings and consolations of each other.

*'Our hope for you is unshaken;  
for we know that as you share in our sufferings,  
so also you share in our consolation.'* (2 Corinthians 1:7)

To this Corinth community in Greece,  
Paul shared the news about earlier hard times in his ministry,  
and the importance of praying for each other.

Before we listen to St Paul's insights,  
let us pause and call to mind the times when we hear the word 'despairing'.  
Some examples are

- Despairing for our future because of inaction on climate change
- Despairing for Australia because of continuing sexism and inequality
- Despairing because of the Church betrayal of people in cover-ups of sexual abuse
- Despairing because of the social impact of the COVID Pandemic
- Despairing over society's tolerance of domestic violence
- Despairing because of relationship breakdowns, unemployment and drug use
- Despairing because of the youth suicide rates in Australia

Despairing is more than concern or worrying about something.  
All the issues referred to above are critical.  
St Paul himself had to work through his despair,

to find and live out the gifts of hope and endurance and courage.

Some examples of people not surrendering their hope include”

- In Australia, the long campaign of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and supporters for the **1967 Referendum**, and many ongoing justice campaigns since then.
- The people behind the **Iron Curtain** who found freedom after decades of captivity.
- The people of **Timor Leste** who never surrendered their hope for independence, even though many Western commentators thought it was unlikely.
- The people of **South Africa** who never surrendered their hope for an end to apartheid and to free elections.

In those and many other campaigns for human rights, justice, freedom and equality, we know that **endurance, courage and hope have been essential.**

*How did St Paul work through his despair and find hope?*

He says:

*“We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.*

*He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again, as you also join in helping us by your prayers, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted to us through the prayers of many.”*

#### **4. Moments of Conversion**

##### *a) Acting justly.*

We know that Paul stopped persecuting Christians, when God called him to become a Christian himself.

He surrendered his desire to persecute.

Paul needed time to adjust to the realization of how he had oppressed Christians.

He needed to find the truth about himself.

In searching for the truth, God directly spoke to him, and God guided him through the wisdom of others.

*How do we give up our appetite to punish others, and our appetite for retribution by word or deed?*

*How and when do we surrender ourselves to the love of God and neighbour?*

*How do we search for the truth about ourselves?*

*Who helps us to grow in love and hope?*

**[pause, pray and reflect]**

*b) Acting with God's help.*

Another moment of conversion that we experience in our Christian lives, is when we convert from thinking that we can do it all ourselves, to realizing that we need God in all we do.

St Paul told us that this happened earlier in the ministry in Asia.

*How and when did that conversion come about for us?*

**[pause, pray and reflect]**

*c) Acting and living and breathing in union with God.*

St Paul grew beyond his achievements and failures.

He grew into the desire to be in tune with God, doing God's will, not his own.

Hope deepened.

A further moment of conversion comes when we realize, that not only do we need God every day, but that we are called to live out God's will fully in all we do every day. It is no longer asking God to help us do it **our way**, but now following the promptings of the Holy Spirit, to live **God's way**, to do God's will.

**[pause, pray and reflect]**

In the sixteenth century, Saint Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross wrote in depth about those moments in people's lives. And in the twentieth century, Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), explained John's insights in her work 'The Science of the Cross'. Such moments of continual conversion can vary in length of time. All three saints explained how we change **when our primary desire and hope is in God**, and how God graces us, as we grow in love of God.

Saint Paul **moved from despair** with the enormous challenges he faced, **to hope and trust in God**, as he continued to develop in his spiritual life.

Let us listen to Paul as he explained the changes in himself. Returning to the Second Letter of St Paul to the Corinthian community, he said: *'Such is the confidence that we have through Christ towards God. Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant,*

*not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.'* (2 Corinthians 3:4-6)

Their competence was from God.

Let us hear what a difference that makes amid the challenges of life.

We accept that we are vulnerable, like clay jars.

God is the treasure.

*'For we do not proclaim ourselves;*

*we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake.*

*For it is the God who said, '*

*Let light shine out of darkness',*

*who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge  
of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

*But we have this treasure in clay jars,*

*so that it may be made clear*

*that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.*

*We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed;*

*perplexed, but not driven to despair;*

*persecuted, but not forsaken;*

*struck down, but not destroyed;*

*always carrying in the body the death of Jesus,*

*so that the life of Jesus*

*may also be made visible in our bodies.'* (2 Corinthians 4.5-11)

These insights direct us in humility before God.

### **5. The Roman Community**

In speaking about the suffering of Christians, St Paul in his Letter to the Romans, connected suffering, character and hope

and explained why that hope did not disappoint them.

*'knowing that suffering produces endurance,*

*and endurance produces character,*

*and character produces hope,*

*and hope does not disappoint us,*

*because God's love has been poured into our hearts*

*through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.'* (Romans 5:3-5)

Linking God's love and the Cross. Paul revealed:

*'But God proves his love for us*

*in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.'* (Romans 5:8)

and reminded them:

*'For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.*

*For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear,*

*but you have received a spirit of adoption.'* (Romans 8:14-15)

As Paul wrote about hope, he pointed to the presence of the Holy Spirit:

- in creation including ourselves,

- and in prayer.

*'We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.*

*For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.'* (Romans 8:22-27)

Paul expressed his hope with deep conviction.

*'in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, 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.'* (Romans 8:37-39)

Christian hope is deeper than the secular sense of 'expect'.  
It is in relationship with God,  
and in our desire to deepen our attentiveness to the presence of God.

When we think of Saint Paul,  
we can be tempted  
to concentrate only on his dramatic conversion moment on the road to Damascus.  
But there were continuing moments of conversions for him.  
Paul learnt to stop dragging his cross,  
and to pick up his cross and follow Jesus.

In picking up his cross and carrying it, he found joy.  
As he said to the Romans,

*'Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.'* Romans 12.12:

and

*'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.'* Romans 15.13:

Thank you for participating in the reflections so far.  
Let us pray together Paul's prayer,  
for each of us, our families and our communities,  
and for those with whom we are in solidarity.

*'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,  
so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.'*  
Amen.

Father Gerry Hefferan  
7 October 2021