
MINISTERS OF HOPE (2)



In the preceding article I expressed my gratitude to those sowers of hope who are in the Church, especially those who help our children and youth prepare and celebrate the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, reconciliation, and the Eucharist. They can rest assured that everything they do to them will one day bear fruit. It is also the same with those who collaborate in marriage preparation, priestly formation, and the anointing of the sick.

DIVINE PROMISE

In my previous article, I referred to a passage from the prophet Isaiah, in order to give a deep meaning to these preparations: "For just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to him who sows and bread to him who eats, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it" (55:10,11). Let us never doubt the effectiveness of the word sown in the hearts of the engaged, of our future priests, and of the sick. This word has a divine potential which no one can destroy. A word of hope has been sown.

INHERITING LOVE

Even if marriage and family statistics are often very disappointing, it is important that engaged couples themselves and those who help them prepare for marriage be filled with hope. How would it be possible to build on a strong foundation without the hope of a lasting and always stronger love? They are very happy, the engaged who can tell their parents and grandparents: "We have inherited our love from you!" The future of today's homes took generations to prepare: they are precious gardens being cultivated with care, on which the greatest hopes are placed. This does not imply that the children who have experienced the death of their parents, or separations and divorces, have already missed out on life. Life places in their path other sources of love and hope. I greatly admire the couples and priests who expend much energy for the engaged to get to know one another better and give themselves better chances to succeed in life and to grow in mutual love, and that they understand better the greatness and beauty of the sacrament of matrimony. Who can tell how powerful a kind word on behalf of a loving couple can be? Who can measure the power of the witness given by parents and friends who really love one another? Who can evaluate the power of a prayer made for engaged couples? Sister Emmanuelle, who spent her life with the Cairo rag pickers, wrote this prayer on the occasion of a close friend's marriage: "Lord, we give our love to you so that it never die. May its source be in you so that each of us try to love rather than to be loved, and to give, more than to receive. May our days of happiness not bog us down in indifference to the rest of the world. May the days of sorrow not distress us, but may they be the glue of our love. Lord, you who are life, may we never refuse life which will try to be born from our love."

“I WILL GO TO THE ALTAR OF GOD.”

It used to be that each time he began Mass the priest would pray these words from Psalm 23, at the foot of the altar: “I will go in to the altar of God, the God of my gladness and joy. Send forth your light and your fidelity; they shall lead me on and bring me to your holy presence.” A very simple prayer, but full of confidence. In these days when we find the harvest great and the priests fewer and fewer, we could be tempted to be discouraged. But this would be an insult to the Good Shepherd who watches constantly over his Church and who never ceases to give it the Gospel men and women needed. From the beginning of the Church there has never been a greater number of priests and future priests. It is terrific to see the variety of ministries and services in the Church today: we must acknowledge this and be grateful to God. However, a priest can only be replaced by another priest: his ministry is ordained to presiding the community given to his care. The parish of tomorrow will eventually be composed of several communities, but it shall always be presided by a priest to proclaim the Word of God, celebrate the sacraments, and create the unity of the people of God. There will be work enough for everyone! Every person will be called upon to activate the gifts and charisms received from the Lord. We must give thanks for the future priests who with Christ have accepted today's challenges, and we must give thanks for all those who accompany them along this wonderful path. “Lord, we pray to you with the priests who bear the concerns of the Christians of those communities to which they minister. We pray you with all those who are preparing for the service they shall be given to awaken, reconcile, gather, and comfort their brothers and sisters in the faith.”

“YOU ARE OUR HOPE.”

I am touched by my sick sisters and brothers, for their surprising courage. I am assured of this: the Spirit of strength they received at their baptism and confirmation, is always with them. The Lord has placed in them a faith and hope which do them good. However, for them, too, there is a sacrament which reminds them that the Risen Christ loves them in a special way, that they have value in his eyes, and that the hope of overcoming their sickness and even death is given to them by the presence of Jesus at the very centre of their trial. They are precious, those services rendered to the sick by those who are close to them: the medical team and support staff. I bless the Lord for having put in the heart of several volunteers, concern for those in the greatest pain. I bless the Lord for those who visit the sick at home, in the nursing home, or in the hospital. I bless the Lord for all the priests who have a word of comfort for them and who celebrate with them the sacraments of the sick, notably the Eucharist and the anointing of the sick. According to an expression coined by Picasso: “It takes time to be young, time to marvel more and more, to be brighter and brighter, and always freer.” And prayer contributes to keeping one young inside, when the outside has been ravaged!

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