

Centenary of the birth into heaven of SAINT JOSEPH ALLAMANO

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HOLINESS AND HOPE

“Paul was a lonely fisherman who lived by the sea. After losing his wife, he had never gone fishing with his boat again. The days passed slowly, and it no longer made sense for him to sail the waves he loved so much. One winter night a strong storm hit the small village: the winds were howling, and the waves were like furious monsters. Paul looked at everything through the window, until, amid the lightning and thunder, he saw a small light flashing in the distance. It was the lighthouse that remained on, still, despite all the chaos that surrounded it. The next morning, he learned that a boat of young fishermen had been lost at sea and that it was the light of the lighthouse that had guided them to the shore. The next day, something changed. He cleaned his old boat, fixed the sails, and went fishing at sunset. Paul understood that, sometimes, hope is just that: a small light lit in the storm.”

This little story helps us to understand that hope does not eliminate the storm, but indicates a way, it does not require great certainties, but only small steps towards certainty. In today's world, surrounded by crisis and despair, hope is not a luxury, it is a vital necessity. And, like the lighthouse for sailors, it remains still, lit, inviting us to continue, even when all seems lost.

The word hope carries within it a silent dynamism. In Latin, *spes* means “trustful waiting”, and is related to the verb *sperare* (to wait with confidence). In Greek, the corresponding word is *elpís* (ἐλπίς), which also refers to waiting, but with a more existential connotation: a trust turned to the future, often beyond the visible.

Pope Francis, in this Jubilee Year, has invited us to live our faith as a journey, reminding us that Christian life is a continuous pilgrimage to God. Hope, in this context, is not simply optimism or desire for a better future, but a theological virtue based on the certainty that God is faithful to his promises: “*«May we who have taken refuge in him be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us. We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered.»* (Heb 6:18-20). Those words are a forceful encouragement for us never to lose the hope we have been given, to hold fast to that hope and to find in God our refuge and our strength.”¹

St. Joseph Cafasso, model of hope

St. Joseph Allamano pointed out to his uncle Giuseppe Cafasso as a model of hope that all his missionaries had to follow: “*He had so much hope that he also transmitted it to others. When someone told him that the gate of heaven is narrow, he immediately replied: “Oh yes? So let us enter one at a time! “He was able to instil hope even in those condemned to death, giving them messages to take to Our Lady; and after an execution, he exclaimed: “Here is another saint!” And he added: “Those scoundrels steal our heaven!” Therefore, we must hope, hope with all our might!*”²

Hope is not only an abstract theological virtue, but a concrete force that gives meaning and direction to life, even in the most dramatic situations, such as the approach of death. We are invited to live an active, contagious hope, full of trust in God's love, that is, as missionaries, we are called to be sources of hope for others, even (or especially) when all seems lost.

¹ Pope Francis, *Spes non confundit*.

² *This I want you to be*, chapter 5, 91.

Trust: the purest hope

In his spirituality, Joseph Allamano speaks to us of trust as the highest form of hope, its “quintessence”. The word “quintessence”, which derives from the Latin *quinta essentia*, suggests all that is purest, most essential: we must trust in God above our weaknesses, above our falls, above our human logic.

There is in our lives an eternal conflict between doing nothing and the greatness of our missionary vocation but let us not be discouraged because this is a common experience among those who seek to live the Gospel authentically: they feel unworthy, incapable, discouraged. But the answer is not to give up, but rather to dive deeper into trust.

A missionary without trust becomes “*a torment for himself and for others*”. Without trust there is no joy, and without joy there is no Gospel that can be transmitted. Trust is therefore not only a theological virtue, but an apostolic duty because it is contagious, generates peace and bears fruit: “*I love very much a prayer about trust in God: one day I will bring it to you*”. “*I will never lose trust in You, my God. Oh, how beautiful it is!*”³

This trust needs to be cultivated, nurtured and shared. Psalm 124 - “*Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion: it does not waver; it stands firm forever*” - exhorts us to possess this firmness because it will be the foundation of our mission.

Hope in Being a Missionary

Hope profoundly transforms the life of the missionary, leading him to live with a new and paschal spirit, that is, to live in the light of Christ's Easter, cultivating a new way of being, of thinking, of acting and of relating to God, to others and to history itself. Here are some of the challenges that St. Joseph Allamano presents to us, always anchored in hope:

- To be new and Easter missionaries who live with a renewed perspective, without fear of history or the future, always open to the newness of the Risen One: “*Do not say, 'Who knows if I will be saved?'*,

³ *Conf. MC*, II, 443.

*but: «I want to be saved, and therefore I want to amend my defects and not be discouraged.»*⁴

- To be contemplative and poor missionaries, capable of recognizing God in the deserts of life, rooted in history but always with an eye to the future: *“Now, when we walk in the presence of God, we do things well, with perfection”*.⁵

- To love time itself by faithfully living the present, the “hour” that has been given to us, without shirking responsibility, seeing the now as the true time of God: *“«In the favourable moment I heard you and in the day of salvation I helped you. Now is the favourable moment, now is the day of salvation!» (2 Cor 6:2). St. Paul defines the time of the Gospel as a ‘favourable time’, to be accepted with gratitude and love.”*⁶

- To live with joy is mission and witness, because true joy is born of God and is sustained by prayer, the cross and the hope of eternity. In this way, hope becomes a source of renewal, fidelity and joy for the missionary, supporting him on his journey and making him a sign of God for the world: *“Courage, therefore, and be joyful. St. Francis de Sales was always cheerful. «Serve the Lord in joy!» (Ps 100:2)”*⁷

For us missionaries, hope is what allows us to always start over – *nunc coepi!* – with courage, joy and fidelity. In this Jubilee Year, we are all pilgrims of hope, called to keep alive the light that guides and warms. Like the lighthouse in the storm, hope does not drive away the winds and does not calm the sea but shows the way. And that's enough to keep going!

For personal reflection

- How am I a light beacon in the lives of others?
- Is hope a reality in my missionary life?
- What is my commitment as a pilgrim of hope?

⁴ *This I want you to be*, chapter 5, 91.

⁵ *This I want you to be*, chapter 10, 182.

⁶ *This I want you to be*, chapter 3, 39.

⁷ *This I want you to be*, chapter 12, 199.