

**Bread of Hope, Cup of Salvation:
Eucharist and Hope**

Anthony Schueller, SSS

December

*The holy season of Advent is upon us. Let us really enter
into the spirit of the holy Church, a spirit of penance,
prayer of longing for Jesus, in order that he may be born
in our souls by his love and virtues.*

Saint Peter Julian Eymard

Preface

Advent is a time of hope and joyful anticipation. It is that time of year when we are invited, even told, to wish for more. For the LORD promises justice for the poor and the afflicted, says the prophet Isaiah. The wolf will sit with the lamb; the leopard will lie down with the kid; the calf and the lion will browse together, with the little child to lead them. What a holy season, Saint Eymard reminds us, to wait and watch for Jesus to be born again in our hearts.

Introduction to the Theme

Our theme during this session is Eucharist and hope. Hope is one of the three theological virtues (along with faith and love). The whole of the Christian life hinges on these. A great theologian once called hope the greatest virtue and the sign of a true Christian. After all, people who believe that God has loved us and offered himself for our redemption cannot but be hopeful people! Advent is the season of hopefulness in a special way, an opportunity to enter into the hopefulness of the chosen people as they awaited the Messiah, and a time for us to recall our own Christian hopefulness as we live in expectation of Christ's return one day. This evening we will explore the relationship between the eucharistic celebration and Christian hope.

Opening Prayer

Leader: This is the season of watching and waiting.

All: The time of joyous expectation of new life.

Leader: Now does the season of hope unfold.

All: In the darkness hope is waiting to be born in our hearts.

Leader: Let us be in God's presence with joy and confidence.

All: Blessed be the name of the one who comes to save us.

Leader: God of our past,
you sent the prophets and John the Baptist
to prepare the faithful remnant of Israel to receive the Christ.
We rejoice that John's message transcends the centuries
and finds an echo in our hearts today.

All: God of our present, you are ever with us.
Forgive our failure to recognize you in one another.
Give us grace and mercy to endure all things
for your glory and that of your son Jesus.
Strengthen us through the Eucharist
- sustaining bread for our journey of faith -
until one day we stand in your presence
to share that future which is ours in Jesus Christ our Lord.
May all that we are and do this day,
and all our tomorrows,
ready the world for his coming at the end of time. Amen

Song

"City of God," by Dan Schutte, Music Issue of Today's Missal – Oregon Catholic Press.

Teaching

Note: Presenter begins by relating a personal experience of hopelessness in her/his life.

1. It is hard to be hopeful at times, especially when we experience difficulties, problems, and anxieties. Our stressful world doesn't help the situation much, leaving us often without the support of family and friends in difficult times or convincing us that we have to "tough it out," go it alone.
2. Throughout its long history, Israel encountered many difficulties. Its covenant relationship with God was no guarantee of a problem-free existence. There was the constant temptation to compromise its fundamental principles in order to be accepted by other peoples. There were struggles to enter into and take possession of the Promised Land. There were corrupt kings and priests, social problems and injustice, and stultifying effects of formalized religion.
3. Israel was at its lowest point during the period of the Babylonian Exile in the sixth century, B.C. Forced into exile and stripped of the temple of God's abiding presence, the people felt that Yahweh had abandoned them. They were without hope, until the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezechiel announced that God would establish a new covenant with them, one which would never be broken or altered. This was the time of the great messianic hope.
4. The Emmanuel prophecy of Isaiah 7:10-15, in particular, gave hope to the people: "Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz: 'Ask, for a sign from the Lord, your God; let it be deep as the nether world, or high as the sky!' But Ahaz answered, 'I will not ask! I will not tempt the Lord!' Then he said: 'Listen, O house of David! It is not enough for you to weary men, must you also weary my God! Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel.'"

The promise of a savior restored the people's confidence. While there is much speculation as to this savior's identity and exact role in Israel's history, for us he is Jesus Christ.

5. The Jewish people lived in constant expectation of the Messiah's coming. He would be a new David - just, holy, wise, and powerful. The story of Israel's messianic hope is best told in the utterance of the prophets and people like Elizabeth and Zechariah, Mary and Joseph. In them, the faith and hope of an entire nation find expression. They give voice to Israel's intense longing for a savior, the anointed one, whose coming would testify to God's faithful love.

In Luke's gospel we find two extraordinary songs of praise to God, whose fidelity to his promises is the source of Israel's confidence. They are Mary's *Magnificat* (1:46-55) and Zechariah's *Benedictus* (1:67-79). These canticles celebrate the advent of the Messiah.

6. There is a vital link between memory and hope in the Judeo-Christian experience. As the people recalled God's faithfulness in the past, they were given the confidence to believe that this same God would be faithful to his present commitments and future promises. *Remembering God's faithfulness in the past is the key to our hope and confidence.*

Note: Distribute copies of the *Magnificat* and the *Benedictus*, and ask the participants to identify the elements which reflect an appreciation for how God has honored his promises. Or ask the participants to open their bibles to the passages noted above.

7. Like the Jews of old, who eagerly awaited the coming of the Messiah, we Christians look to the day of Christ's glorious return, when history as we know it will end and the reign of God will be established in its fullness. Moreover, we are called to anticipate his second coming by our conduct (2 Peter 3:8-14).
8. We are like the Israelites in yet another way. During the time of their sojourn in the desert, as they waited for the fulfillment of God's promise to lead them into their own land, the people grew impatient and restless. They complained openly against God and Moses, convinced that they had been delivered from the hands of one enemy, the Egyptians, only to fall prey to the power of still greater foes, death and despair. Responding to the people's pleas, God sent them refreshing water from the rock and manna, miraculous bread from the heavens.
9. Lest we, in this indefinite time before the Lord's second coming, succumb to similar impatience and despair, God has given us the refreshing waters of faith, and Jesus, the true bread come down from above, that hope might burn in our hearts.

The Eucharist is *our bread of hope* - blessed, broken, and shared as the foretaste and pledge of the messianic banquet in the kingdom of God. Our spiritual hunger sated by this bread, we journey onward in hope.

Note: The presenter takes time to sum up the learnings about Eucharist and hope.

Closing Prayer

(In the presence of the Blessed Sacrament if possible)

Opening Song: "City of God"

By Dan Schutte, Music Issue of Today's Missal - Oregon Catholic Press

First Reading: Isaiah 11:1-10

But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord, and his delight shall be the fear of the Lord. Not by appearance shall he judge, nor by hearsay shall he decide. But he shall judge the poor with justice, and decide aright for the land's afflicted. He shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Justice shall be the band around his waist, and faithfulness a belt with the kid; the calf and young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them. The cow and the bear shall be neighbors, together their young shall rest; the lion shall eat hay like the ox. The baby shall play by the cobra's den, and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair. There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord, as water covers the sea. On that day, the root of Jesse, set up as a signal for the nations, the Gentiles shall seek out, for his dwelling shall be glorious.

Period of Silence

Second Reading: Luke 1:46-55

And Mary said: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed. The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him. He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped Israel his servant, remembering his mercy, according to his promise to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Period of Silence

Intercessory Prayer

Eucharistic canticle

Leader: As an advent people, we praise God for the gift of the Eucharist:

All: Bread of hope, cup of salvation, sustain us on our pilgrim way.

Leader: As we journey together to the land of promise:

All: Bread of hope, cup of salvation, sustain us on our pilgrim way.

Leader: As we choose to risk freedom over security:

All: Bread of hope, cup of salvation, sustain us on our pilgrim way.

Leader: As we seek vision and courage for life's challenges:

All: Bread of hope, cup of salvation, sustain us on our pilgrim way.

Leader: As we take responsibility for our decisions and actions:

All: Bread of hope, cup of salvation, sustain us on our pilgrim way.

Leader: As we acknowledge our dependence on you, the author of life:

All: Bread of hope, cup of salvation, sustain us on our pilgrim way.

Leader: As we share freely rather than hoard our blessings:

All: Bread of hope, cup of salvation, sustain us on our pilgrim way.

Leader: As we trust that you will provide what we need:

All: Bread of hope, cup of salvation, sustain us on our pilgrim way.

Leader: As we become a community of faith and service:

All: Bread of hope, cup of salvation, sustain us on our pilgrim way.

Leader: As we serve you in the poor, the hungry, the homeless:

All: Bread of hope, cup of salvation, sustain us on our pilgrim way.

Leader: As we work for peace and justice:

All: Bread of hope, cup of salvation, sustain us on our pilgrim way.

Leader: As we wait in hope for the return of the Lord:

All: Bread of hope, cup of salvation, sustain us on our pilgrim way.

Incensing of the Blessed Sacrament and the assembled community

Benediction

Reposition

Closing Prayer

God our Father
whose faithfulness can never fail us,
remember us, the work of your hands,
and give us the constant help of your grace;
that, with a love beyond reproach
and strengthened by the Eucharist, our bread of Hope,
we may serve you always
and keep watch for the glorious coming of Jesus Christ,
in whose name and Spirit we make this prayer. Amen.

Dismissal with some sign of peace.