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VITA, DULCEDO ET SPES NOSTRA

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We all know Péguy's famous words about hope. He has God say:

> "'Faith doesn't surprise me … the poor things need to be blind in order not to see me truly. …Charity doesn't surprise me either. …What really amazes me is hope. I just can't get over it'."[1]

There is something profoundly true in this. We can understand the need for faith; God is so far above our intelligence! A child naturally believes his father and mother … until he is how old, we might wonder? We would have to reflect on this, but in any case it is certain, from a psychological standpoint, that we have all believed at some point without any difficulty whatsoever. Love is even simpler to understand: one loves one's mother instinctively; one loves one's father (except when he corrects us too much). But hope …? Psychologically speaking, hope is quite amazing and something very difficult to talk about in a precise way, because it is not simple. St Thomas's treaty on faith is magnificent; his treaty on charity is sublime and we see the analogies clearly. But when it comes to hope, things are more difficult.

HOPE AND FIDELITY

To hope is to desire; there is a desire in every hope. For Catherine of Sienna, desire – "infinite desire"[2] – is the greatest thing in our lives and that with which God is most concerned (she, whose soul was on fire with desire, ought to know). This is true. Hope gives us a desire which means that we never cease or stop; one has no place to lay one's head[3], for in this desire, this hope, one can only stop in God, in a divine love - in the heart of Jesus. We have a great desire for a good that we do not yet possess but that we yearn for, and all our energies are spent in working to acquire it. This is true of hope at a human level, and it is even truer of supernatural hope, which is the desire or thirst for a good promised by God. Divine hope is always based on a promise. It may be a far-off promise, but it is the promise of a good that will be our happiness, that will fulfill us and that will be everything to us – the Beatific Vision[4]. Divine hope is directly and immediately concerned with the happiness that will be given to us from the fact that we shall live the very happiness of God – not an inferior happiness, not the happiness of a creature, but the happiness of a child of God. This is what gives us, in such a strong way, the sense of our divine life; one day we will share the very life of God, the same life *substantially*, since we shall see Him as He really is, and we shall be like Him[5].

Divine hope, therefore, is a very radical and deep desire in us, which involves a love for a good that we do not yet possess but that we will possess one day. Divine hope is founded on God's promise. This implies faith but more than just faith, since it involves us adhering to a promise that we

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[1] *Le porche du mystère de la deuxième vertu*, in *Œuvres complètes*, La Pléiade, Gallimard, 1975, pp. 531-535.
[2] Cf. *Dialogue* I, ch. 2.
[3] Cf. Lk. 9, 58.
[4] See *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q.17, a.2.
[5] Cf. 1 Jn. 3:2

consider to be *already* brought about - needing to be brought about more and more, but nevertheless *already realized*, for there is something in us already that makes us children of God. God's promise is fully brought about in love, as we know. But divine hope prevents us from stopping on the way; our only rest is in God, as St Thérèse quite rightly says. Hope makes us fly over all the hurdles - it prevents us from stopping at something less than the promised good. The promised beatitude takes hold of us, grasps us, draws us towards God and gives us life: "Thy promise gives me life"[6] – "Uphold me according to thy promise, that I may live"[7] – "Give me life according to Thy promise!"[8] As we cannot acquire this promised good by ourselves, we call on the help of God, begging for His help and clinging to it: "Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!"[9] – "He is our help and our shield"[10] – "Our help is in the name of the Lord"[11]. Divine hope, therefore, is concerned both with the *end* (what God has promised, the last promise, the "last eschatological good") and with the *help of God*.[12] A true promise is always the promise of an ultimate good, something that will bring us full happiness. At the same time, we rely on God's help, on the help of Christ. We know that this good is given to us through the merits of Christ, through the mystery of the Cross. We do not obtain it alone, rather it is Jesus in us who obtains it and who gives us the strength to do everything necessary to move towards the good – "Hope in the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; yes, hope in the Lord"[13].

The special characteristic of theological hope therefore, is that it is founded on these two points. We found our hope on a promise - on God's extraordinary mercy that wants His beatitude to be *our* beatitude, that wants His happiness, His own life to be ours and wants His glory, His victory of love to be given to us; and we also rely on God's help, as we would rely on the help of a friend who alone can enable us to acquire this good: "Without me you can do nothing"[14]. We know very well that without His help we can do absolutely nothing.

We can now see that hope is exercised in two different ways. There is one way, which is to do with our own will: I *want* to hope. Here there is a cooperation between God and our conquering will. This is perhaps what characterizes hope: a man of hope is a man of conquest, true conquest of the divine beatitude. But there is also an exercise of hope which is divine and which is thanks to the gift of Holy Fear or Awe. This gift helps us understand our poverty. We know that however great our efforts may be, they are incapable of giving us eternal happiness and divine beatitude. The more we know that we cannot obtain it by ourselves, the more our desire increases. And so we have a great desire for God's help, and we do not cease to ask God for it: "But I am poor and needy; hasten to me, O God! Thou art my hope and my deliverer; O Lord, do not tarry!"[15], "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble"[16].

It is interesting to notice that because of the great rapidity we live in today, in this world of such high speeds, our human hopes are always rather weak; because everything goes so quickly, the tensions and failures are greater. We need to understand that hope involves a divine patience. We

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[6] Ps. 119:50
[7] Ps. 119:116
[8] Ps. 119:154
[9] Ps. 27:7
[10] Ps. 33:20; 115: 9-11
[11] Ps. 124:8
[12] *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q.17, a.4, c.
[13] Ps. 27:14
[14] Jn. 15:5
[15] Ps. 70:5
[16] Ps. 46:1

must put ourselves at God's rhythm, at the rhythm He works at, and to know that beatitude will be given to us freely at *the moment God wills it*. This is why hope today implies that we pay very special attention to fidelity. We know how difficult it is to be faithful today. Fidelity firstly concerns charity, but it also concerns faith and hope, because love (*agape* in Greek) transforms the way in which faith and hope are exercised. This is absolutely vital for us today; so often the speed of events prevents love from profoundly taking root. The danger of the world today lies in living according to appearances, at a purely exterior level: we do not take the time to go deeply. Everyone acknowledges that this is so, particularly students: exams and application processes are more and more competitive, requiring you more and more to give your all – and this lasts your whole life through. You are constantly at risk of losing your place if you don't work at a pace that is such that many people fall ill (this is surely a sign of something).

The great speed that everything goes at today means that love, faith and hope no longer have the same fidelity as they once had. Today it is much harder than it previously was to be faithful. We can see this in the number of divorces today. When one sees two people whose marriage one blessed getting divorced, one knows that on their wedding day they truly loved each other; and yet a few years later they are getting divorced…We see it in religious life too: faithfulness to one's vows is much more difficult than it was, because the objective truth of our vows, our promises, is more difficult to keep hold of – subjectivity gradually draws us towards sincerity. Sincerity does not imply fidelity; on the contrary, it implies relativity according to the events as they unfold.

The special character of hope today, is it not this faithfulness in patience? We need to be patient in a divine way, waiting for the good pleasure of the Father to be accomplished for us, knowing that it is through this that we will be faithful, and understanding that our love and our hope must have an objective character rather than a subjective one (which leads to a turning in on oneself). If, in our world today, hope is the most attacked of the three theological virtues, it is precisely because it is this desire to go always further, and so its growth is very linked to time; yet, as we have said, everything goes at a greater speed today – hence the difficulty in being faithful in hope. When there is no longer faithfulness in hope, we turn in on ourselves and fall into a sincerity that excuses all our infidelities. We could take lots of examples and we would see that this question always comes back to a link between patience and faithfulness, in this age that is constantly accelerating therefore preventing the necessary taking-root that faithfulness requires. In such conditions, hope, which requires us to live of God's promise (a promise of eternity, beyond time), can only be fully what it should be with great fidelity. This is perhaps the most concrete aspect of our hope today.

We need to see how Mary is faithful in her hope, and how her faithfulness maintains an ever-greater hope in her heart. But first of all, let us reflect a little more on what faithfulness is as regards love and hope.

Is it not true that fidelity is love's greatest secret? Fidelity is love victorious in time. Time wears us out, all of us, and when this wearing out of time is victorious, there is no more fidelity. Why are we not faithful? Because we have found a new love. We have not been vigilant enough, and have fallen into an attitude of false abandon; because of this we have not had the courage to renew our love continuously, like a fire that is constantly renewing itself. We have let a certain worn-out quality creep into our love, and this has led to our love not having the ardor it once had. If love is not constantly renewed it loses its strength. We need to adhere to the one we love ecstatically, going beyond ourselves and overcoming all obstacles so that the person we love is able to draw us to himself in a new way all the time. Love gets worn out when we let it be contaminated by 'the everyday'. 'The everyday' makes it banal and prevents our love from reaching the heights; it leads to that sort of anonymity that characterizes false poverty. That is what we mean by love being worn out; because there is nothing left that holds us, love becomes banal, and when that happens love can no longer be faithful - it does not have the strength to overcome obstacles. Is it not true that

unfaithfulness like this is the cause of the greatest sufferings and despair today? What is to become of a world where love is no longer faithful, where there is no longer the chance of constantly rediscovering and re-finding the person we love? When love is no longer being constantly renewed, the attraction that the one we love holds for us cannot be perfectly realized and cannot continuously renew itself. All sorts of distractions appear and we let ourselves be carried away by secondary things that we would forget about if our love were true. When we no longer experience the strength of the attraction of the person we love, everything becomes banal and relativized; we do not choose, here and now, the person we love, to whom we have given ourselves, and whom we have promised to accompany right to the very end (death being understood in faithfulness).

The world is not faithful anymore. At La Salette Mary wept over our infidelity to God's commandments: we work on Sundays, not understanding that we should offer God a moment of 'wasted' time, so that Jesus can work in us more. We ought to pay careful attention to this and ask Our Lady to help us remain faithful, through the gift that we have made of ourselves to the one we love, to the one who is our friend, Jesus, "friend of men" and our friend.

Faithfulness requires a great strength in love. This is why only spiritual and divine love can require faithfulness. Faithfulness cannot exist in instinctive love and passionate love because these loves do not have the necessary strength to remain faithful to loving a person: if a person loses his exterior charm and attraction, his power of captivation, we are likely to look elsewhere. We get tired of always having the same face in front of us, especially when that face becomes sad or bitter, or when there isn't the same spontaneity or youthfulness as there was at the beginning. If we remain purely at the level of the senses, our love experiences a great trial. But if, on the other hand, we have discovered a love that is more interior, and if we love in charity, we are not tempted to stay at the level of the senses; we discover the *person* that we ought to love. As long as we have not yet discovered the *person* we ought to love, spiritual love cannot attract us with the same strength or power, so we are likely only to be interested by secondary things. But this risk is not there if we have touched something much more profound i.e. the person, because someone's person remains the same. Someone's person may be hidden from us for a while by sadness, or by tiredness on our part, but it is always there, always present, and can, if we wish it, be a constant source of renewal for us. The exterior aspect of someone, on the other hand, cannot be rediscovered as and when we want. This is why faithfulness does not exist at the human level except in friendship-love, that is, in a reciprocal love that is truly spiritual. Love demands faithfulness because it is the gift of oneself to another; this gift of self cannot be given in exchange for nothing, or for something exterior, because then it is not love. Since friendship-love touches the person, it both gives birth to faithfulness and requires it, in order to be able not only to last but also to grow. If faithfulness disappears it is because we are no longer growing in love. A love that does not grow is a love that is losing its strength and that becomes incapable of giving us the great strength in fidelity that true love demands. That is why we must always ask Our Lady to teach us to be faithful.

Think about the unfaithfulness of Europe to what she once was -- of France's unfaithfulness to her grace of being the eldest daughter of the Church. These are terrible lacks of fidelity, for they are not just a question of one person, but of all those who are engaged in one and the same fidelity. Is this not the great evil of today? It is not always the one we think of immediately; we would think of pride or vanity firstly, but these are a block to fidelity because they prevent love from growing, from being stronger and more conquering.

We must, in spite of everything, maintain our hope, even if from the exterior everything seems to be falling apart and nothing happens as we would have it happen, according to our little human plans and projects. Mary never had any human plans, but we always have a bit of temporal messianism in us. It was this temporal messianism that existed in the hearts of some of the apostles and prevented them being present at the foot of the Cross, as they ought to have been. They should all

have been there, except for Judas -- more united than ever because of his betrayal. But it didn't happen so, and it must have been very hard for Mary. It must have brought her much closer to John, seeing him so faithful. For it was fidelity that enabled John to be there at the foot of the Cross and to gaze upon Jesus, with Mary, as his only hope, because Jesus was accomplishing the Father's will.

All the Father's love and mercy were given to Mary through Jesus, because He was accomplishing the Father's will; and through Jesus' faithfulness and obedience the Father's all-powerfulness was given to her. All Mary's strength and fidelity were deeply rooted in Jesus' fidelity. Mary is not the source of her own fidelity; rather Jesus, in her, is. And it is the same for John: it is Jesus in him. Jesus makes us faithful, with His faithfulness. We can live of Jesus' faithfulness in the same measure in which we are bound to Him, and in which we understand that His heart is given to us - even if, exteriorly, things look like a failure and are overcome by darkness, and the situation seems impossible, unbearable, and all our previous efforts are knocked down in one fell blow ... that's what makes us despair: we cannot see any way out. The Cross is one such dead-end: from the human point of view there is nothing, since the mystery of the Cross culminates in death. Whereas in fact, by His faithfulness, Christ makes use of death to give Himself in the purest possible way, since death is the total stripping of everything (no human hope remains, there is not one human sensibility left: it is a total stripping away).

The mystery of the Cross gives birth to a hope in Mary's heart that is wholly pure because it rests solely on the Father's will, on the accomplishing of His will, on Jesus' radical obedience to the Father. It is here that our hope can grow to its full dimensions, because it rests solely on God's good pleasure and on His love, which enables us to set off again with new momentum. The Father's will for us is a will of love and it is a will that means our love is always new and growing younger all the time. It is this love of the Father for His beloved Son, and so for her too, that is Mary's strength and fidelity; and it is the same for us. We must believe this more than ever before, in a world like ours where, humanly speaking there is not a lot of hope left. When we see such violent and far-reaching battles we are humanly at our wits' end, and that is why we do not dare to look at reality: it's too hard, everything is at a dead-end and there isn't even the littlest light ... But the light can only be an interior light; it can only be in the heart of Jesus, in the Eucharist. Here we have a hope that is greater than ever, precisely because of this extraordinary poverty in which God keeps us. If we are poor and offer our poverty to God we can more easily set off again in hope, for we know that God takes care of the poor – "Yahweh listens to the poor"[17], and we know that if we become truly poor, God will rest His gaze full of infinite tenderness upon us[18]. This is why we must live as fully as possible such moments as those we are now living, without diminishing in any way what they signify. This requires a great poverty on our part, a total gift, in a very vertical, divine sense, because from the human point of view we are at a dead-end. This is why the times we live in are the time for hope. We see in chapter 14 of the Apocalypse an extraordinary momentum of hope: it is the hour of judgment and there is an astonishing appeal to commend everything to the Father's mercy, to the mercy of Jesus, and of Mary. We cannot separate these three; they are linked at this all-important moment when God separates out the good from the bad. It is exactly this that gives us hope and prevents us from despairing; faced with the apparent victory of evil, those who live too much in the world of the senses succumb to despair.

The source of our hope is the wounded heart of the Lamb, Jesus' state as a victim. In this state, Jesus can refuse us nothing because He has given everything. He has positively chosen us, since He chose the Father's will in order to save us and offered His life for us. In a world that is plunged in despair – and despair gives way to violence – the mercy and love of Jesus, of the immolated Lamb enables us to live in faithfulness, and faithfulness gives way to a true gentleness. Is this not the

[17] "Yahweh..." (Ps. 69:34); "" (Ps. 72: 12-13); "" (Ps. 10:17)
[18] "" (Ps. 34:18); "" (Ps. 103:13); "" (Ps. 145:8)

ultimate fruit of love, when confronted with violence and despair? Mary is truly the gentleness of the Father's life that is given to us; in this way she is truly our hope – *vita, dulcedo et spes nostra*. In this world that is despairing, God call us to be witnesses to His love and mercy, to restore hope to those close to us by leading them to the Cross, to the wounded heart of the Lamb, and to Mary's heart. Here we can draw infinite mercy, draw on Jesus' infinite love for us and here we always find the possibility to start over again. This is what is so marvelous: nothing is wasted for Jesus. The suffering of the Cross allows us to be closer than ever to His heart, for at that moment we are clothed with the same garment of suffering, of littleness, of fragility as He is. And we know too that the mystery of the Resurrection is given to us as our very own. Thanks to this, our hope can grow to its full dimension, a dimension that is glorious, victorious and eternal.

TWO MODALITIES OF HOPE IN MARY

Let is think again about Mary's hope and try to penetrate this mystery a little further. If we look closely we can see that hope in Mary has two different modalities. As we saw above, hope can be exercised in two different ways. We see an example of this in John Paul II. At the beginning of his pontificate he had an extraordinary hope, the great hope of an apostle. That is not to say that his hope now does not have the same strength and vigor – not at all! But it seems that the hope he lives now is much more marked by the gift of Holy Fear (the beatitude of the poor) and linked to the mystery of the Cross. These two exercises of hope that we spoke about earlier are indeed the two modalities of hope in Mary.

In Mary there is the great hope of the Annunciation and the profound hope of the Cross and of the Compassion. As Saint Augustine teaches us, the Old Testament is distinguished by faith and hope, and the New Testament by charity, but it is charity transforming hope as it transforms faith. We normally look at the Annunciation from the point of view of faith, and we do so spontaneously for it is the first act of explicitly Christian faith. But we must not forget (and this is perhaps particularly important today) that it is also the fist act of Christian hope.

The angel's greeting indicates that we are passing from the old to the new covenant; but in addition to the greeting, we can immediately say that the angel is asking Mary whether she will enter this "new age" – it is the true and only new age, and it is a promise: "Behold, you will conceive and bear a son, and you will give Him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His ancestor David and He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever and His reign will have no end"[19] This is the most beautiful hope given to a mother, showing her that she is to be the source of a new life, a life that will be something quite unheard of and that will bring about the greatest desire of the whole people of Israel. The great hope of all the prophets is present here; if we were to look again at all the different aspects of hope found in the prophets they would show us that God continuously starts over again to bring about His kingdom. It is indeed the kingdom of God that is announced to Mary. God asks her whether she will be the mother of the One Who will be at the head of His kingdom, whether, in fact, she will be the mother of His kingdom. Divine hope is firstly that: the kingdom of God is within us[20], and takes hold of everything in us. If we want it, if we accept it, if we cooperate with it, the kingdom of God will be brought about and everything will gradually be transformed.

Is this not what characterizes Christian hope? It is both personal and universal; this is where we see our human desires completely surpassed. Human desires are always personal, very individual

[19] Lk. 1:31-33
[20] Lk. 17:21

even. Divine hope implies something very personal, namely our beatitude towards which we are striving and which expresses the fulfillment of that which is most profound in us, the realization of our most personal, intimate desire – that everything in us blossom and be perfectly 'in act'. At the same time it is universal, it is the kingdom of God. The Annunciation made to Mary demonstrates this in an amazing way: isn't the most personal desire of a woman that of finding prolongation in a son? The angel announces to Mary that this Son will be the One Who brings about the whole desire of mankind. Mary is the mother of Him Who is the Son of the Most High. She could not be more of a mother, her maternity could know nothing greater than being the mother of the Son of God: she is the mother *par excellence*.

This is a personal link, since by giving her *fiat* Mary freely chooses her Son. It is the proper characteristic of divine, supernatural hope – a personal link. It is not simply a desire for happiness; it is a personal link of love, of intimacy, of cooperation with someone Who makes us grow, Who is the glory of His mother. And yet at the same time it is something very universal: "He will reign over the House of David forever". This is something for all of her people, and Mary understands it so, she who is so rooted in her people while at the same time being totally given to God. This Annunciation makes the intimate and most personal desires of her heart blossom fully, and at the same time all the desires of her people. We can see how Mary is taken hold of by this promise; what characterizes this *fiat* of hope is that straightaway, knowing her fragility as a little creature beloved by God (she is full of grace, but the more one is filled with grace, the more one is aware of one's poverty and vulnerability), Mary asks the question that is indeed a question of hope: "How can this come about?" This question is not directly to do with faith; it is to do with the promise made to Mary, into which she must enter and within which she must play her extraordinary role of being the mother of the Son of God. Faced with this, the realism of divine hope is immediately to ask this question. It is very significant, especially when we look at the annunciation to Zechariah. Zechariah asks a question that shows a lack of certainty and faith in God's message; he asks his question in order to confirm his faith. Mary's faith is so pure that it can immediately blossom into hope. This hope is not in search of certainty: Mary, in her certainty, does not doubt for a moment. The realism of hope is such that if we hope for a reality that needs to be brought about then it must be brought about immediately. This is proper to the mystery of God. We do not hope for a heaven that is to come, we hope for a heaven that is *already present in us*, for a beatitude that is *already present in us*. Otherwise we drop back into human hope; hoping for something that is not yet here but which will come is proper to human hope.

This is where we see the realism of Christian hope in Mary's heart: "How can this come about?" It is very moving to see Mary acknowledge her poverty: "What you tell me is wonderful! But *me*?" It is not doubt on her part, it is an illustration of the abyss that exists between what God promises, which is to be brought about immediately, is already present, and our fragility and weakness. "How can this come about? I know not man ... I am a little creature who has given herself entirely to God ... this is beyond me, it's not for me..." And so the angel shows her that divine hope requires us to accept everything without knowing precisely in what way things will come about.

The angel shows Mary that God is asking her for a divine hope that involves a real poverty as regards *means*. Poverty as regards the *end* goes without saying; beatitude is completely beyond us. But poverty as regards the means that will allow us to reach and live this beatitude requires an absolutely divine exercise of hope under the working of the gift of Holy Fear, in other words total abandon; not only abandon as regards the future and the mystery of beatitude towards which we are striving, but an abandon as regards what is to be done immediately. This is true divine abandon. It is not very difficult to be abandoned to something that is to come later because is it something completely beyond us; but to be abandoned as regards the *means* we are to take immediately, and to accept not to know them is something quite different! Mary could have replied to the angel by saying, "That's not what I was asking you; I know of course that the Spirit of God will be there, I never

doubted that..." Isn't it wonderful, the way that the angel speaks with Mary? If we were to deal with a brother in the same way he would probably say "I know that!" rather like Martha; when Jesus tells her that her brother will rise again she replies straight away, "I know that he will rise again on the last day". But Jesus is asking Martha for an *immediate* hope, not a far-off hope, and she is not poor enough - she wants to be sure. So Jesus gives her this response: "I am the Resurrection"[21]. If Jesus is there, then the Resurrection is present, and Martha no longer has to wait for the future, it is already present. Isn't this the proper characteristic of Christian hope? It encompasses both the finality and the immediate means, the concrete realization. Yes, Christian hope is precisely the *incarnation of beatitude*. It is not only the incarnation of light. Jesus is present, so we are happy. What is to be happy? It is to be with Jesus; we are not waiting for anything else, we carry on the rest of our way with Jesus, and everything is completely different because the end is present in the means. Isn't this what characterizes the Christian hope we find in Mary and which she helps us to live?

In order to go further into this mystery we could compare Zechariah's hope with Mary's. Zechariah had doubts, no doubt because of Elizabeth; he did not love her enough, or else she did not love him enough. It is very difficult to hope for someone else. We see this all the time when we have divine hope and have to exercise authority. We say " Do such and such a thing", and the person who should do it doesn't see the end in the means ... but God shows us, in hope, that the finality is present in the means. Since they exist in order to move things forward, authority and government should always be exercised in the light of divine hope. We exercise authority over someone so that he goes further forward, not so that he remains stuck where he is. To stay where one is one does not need authority, but to move forward, to get beyond the immediate obstacles we see, one does need it. We risk getting stuck at these obstacles, but we need to overcome them to go further forwards. Zechariah doubted, and God helped him understand that perfect, ultimate hope (ultimate as regards the great hope of the Old Testament) needs to be immediate, beyond all human reflections of prudence. He gave Zechariah a sign in the form of a punishment, a paternal correction so that he was able to hope for himself and for Elizabeth.

We see in all this that our hope becomes divine thanks to the gift of Holy Fear, which makes us live of our poverty. If we do not live of divine poverty God gives a sign that makes us poor and obliges us to enter into a divine poverty. There is something marvelous about this, and we can surmise in it something of how the Holy Spirit desires to lead the Church, especially in her important role of safeguarding inspired scripture. For example, from a chronological point of view, the Annunciation to Mary is revealed to us relative to the annunciation made to Zechariah[22], whereas in fact the mystery of the Annunciation made to Mary is of far greater importance and is, as it were, a new beginning in the history of humanity. From the point of view of the profound reality, Zechariah's hope is wholly relative to Mary's hope. Comparing these two hopes we see immediately how Mary overcame everything that could have been an obstacle preventing her from going as far as possible in divine hope. She gave her *fiat*, she did not discuss it for a single moment, although humanly speaking she was in total darkness. Her hope is the great élan of someone who throws himself out, relying solely on the merciful all powerfulness of God, or properly, on the all powerfulness of God's *goodness*,[23] since by her hope Mary enters into the very mystery of the Incarnation and cooperates with it.

If we look now at Mary's hope at the Cross we are in the presence of the hope of someone poor. It is not only a sign that makes Mary poor (as for Zechariah); it is God who impoverishes her by taking away from her (from the temporal, sensible and human point of view) the One Who is the only

[21] Jn. 11:23-25

[22] Cf. Lk. 1:26 "In the sixth month the Angel Gabriel was sent by God..."

[23] Cf. M.-D. Philippe, *Les motifs de l'Incarnation*, III, in Cahiers de l'Ecole Saint Jean no. 115-116 (sept. – dec. 1987), p. 14: "The most profound reason for the Incarnation is truly God's love: goodness needs to be diffused, to be communicated…"

divine sustainer of her hope. In fact, Jesus had been given to her as both the *end* that finalizes her hope (the Word of God Who takes flesh in her) and as the *means*, the marvelous path, by which she can go all the way to the very end, to reach the *term*. This double gift was given to her at the Annunciation. At the Cross, that which was promised to her is apparently (visibly, at least) taken away. The Angel's prophecy, the promise "he will reign over the House of Jacob forever", is not brought about; on the contrary, Jesus is rejected by the House of Jacob and is condemned by the religious authorities. What a test for Mary's faithfulness! But it is precisely her faithfulness to what the Angel told her at the Annunciation which enables her remain standing at the foot of the Cross and to look upon Jesus crucified in an élan of hope, thirst and desire, lived in radical poverty. At the Cross, the Holy Spirit invites Mary to accept Jesus' poverty in the depths of her heart, the poverty of the Crucified One; and Mary must enter divinely into a new unity of love with Jesus, with her God.

If we pay close attention to what Luke and John tell us, we could say that at the Annunciation Luke presents us with Christian hope, which is a mother's hope. This hope has a maternal modality which carries it a long way, but which is the maternal modality. John, however, by showing us Jesus' gaze on Mary at the Cross – the moment when Jesus says to her "Woman" -- reveals to us Mary's hope at the Cross, the hope of she whom He calls "Woman". He had already called her Woman at the beginning of His apostolic life at Cana. It is only John who tells us this and it is only John who tells us that after Cana Mary followed Jesus. She did not return to Nazareth but followed Jesus to Capernaum (if I dare to put it like this -- she turns her back on Nazareth, in order to go to Capernaum). This word "woman" that Jesus uses when Mary makes her request at Cana, and that He uses again here at the Cross, is such a common word and yet hides something most intimate and personal.

We should not forget, whilst on this topic, the comment that St. Thomas makes about the name of God: when God replies "I am" to Moses's request to know His name,[24] He uses the verb 'to be' which expresses both what is most common (since all realities that exist, *are*) and at the same time, in the most profound and radical way, what God is, because He is the source of Being; He is, and without Him nothing *is*. The name most proper to Him really is, "I am". For this reason when we speak of "God without being" (as was done a few years ago in a book of that title) it proves that we have not understood how the Holy Spirit hides a mystery in something that everyone can understand. The word 'woman' designates, at the very beginning, she whom God wished to give to man, she who is wholly relative to man and wholly intimate to man's heart: " 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman (*ichchah*), because she was taken out of man (*ich*)'"[25]. It is a most common term, which designates this creature in her total relativity to man, but which designates her also as she who is given to man to accompany him throughout his life and to bring to fulfillment what is most precious in his heart. Is it not this that Jesus wants us to understand when He says to Mary, "Woman"? He does not say, "My beloved"; it would have been difficult to do so in the context of the Marriage Feast at Cana and even more so in the context of the Cross. Jesus does not take Mary aside to tell her, "I love you, you know that you are my beloved". No, He hides her. As Mary had hidden Jesus, Jesus hides Mary. Mary, as His mother, had hidden Jesus; the mother had hidden God. Jesus hides Mary by saying to her "Woman", but at the same time He expresses the most intimate and profound mystery of His attachment to her. When Jesus pronounced the words, "Woman, behold your son" there must have been a great silence after the word "woman", for by this He was expressing how He saw the person of Mary. She is the one who is espoused to His heart, the one who will accomplish the same work as He, the same mission, cooperating with Him and the one who

[24] Ex. 3:13-14
[25] Gen. 2:23

completes in the depths of her soul, in her faith and her hope "that which is lacking in the sufferings of Christ"[26].

This helps us grasp the special character of Mary's hope at the Cross. According to St. Thomas Aquinas and to practically all the theologians, Jesus already enjoyed the Beatific Vision[27]. It is a novelty among theologians at the end of the twentieth century to want Jesus to have had faith and hope; they do so because they limit themselves to an anthropology rather than going deeper into metaphysics which would help them to understand the ultimate mystery of the Word "made flesh". They claim therefore that Christ had faith and hope like us, whereas it is far greater to see that the grace of Christ is a unique grace that reaches a fullness. It does so because it is a grace that comes directly from the mystery of the hypostatic union, of the unity of Christ's soul (informing His body) with the Word of God – this personal unity that St. Thomas says is the greatest of all unities. Owing to this unity, Christ's soul is closer to the source of all grace and receives immediately, therefore, the fullness of grace[28]. This fullness of grace means that Jesus, in His human soul, reaches His end immediately. In the soul of Christ, which exists from the very existence of the Word, there isn't any room for faith or hope.[29] He enjoys the Beatific Vision immediately in the depths of His intelligence and His will. Saint Augustine underlines this, and Saint Thomas also studies this in order to demonstrate the difference between He Who is already 'in the end' as the Beloved Son of the Father, and He Who has become 'pilgrim', *viator*[30], in order to save us. We need to grasp properly the link between He Who is the Beloved Son and He Who accomplishes His mission as the One sent by the Father, in His humanity, in His intelligence accompanied by prudence, and in His will which follows His intelligence.

When Jesus offers His life to the Father under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to glorify the Father and to save us, the summits of His intelligence and will cannot know this victimal state, since they enjoy the Beatific Vision. This is where Mary accomplishes and completes Christ's offering, in her soul, which lives the mystery of the Cross in faith, hope and charity. In order for humanity to be fully offered, it is necessary that Mary live, in faith and hope, the mystery of Christ's holocaust. It is important to understand this. Nothing can be added to Christ's offering from the point of view of intensity of love. The sacrifice of Christ is perfect -- we can add nothing to it. But this sacrifice, because it is a sacrifice of love, can overflow (a sacrifice of love always needs to overflow), and it does so in the heart of Mary. It is like the fire that came down from heaven on the altar of Elijah's sacrifice[31]. The fire from heaven need only have burned the victim on the altar; but it is so superabundant that it burns not just the altar itself but even the water around the altar. This is a very beautiful prefiguration of the mystery of Mary's compassion, in which, by her faith and hope Mary becomes the spouse of Christ's heart.

We understand then, the very special role of hope in Mary's soul, as the Woman chosen by the Father to be the mother of the Savior. At the Cross, the mother of the Savior becomes the *socia* (as St. Albert the Great says), the loving companion of the heart of Christ, the spouse of His priestly heart, and does so by her faith and hope. Is this not Mary's greatest secret? Saint Luke shows us Mary as *mother* and in this mystery of maternity, Jesus, Son on Man, is relative to Mary. Saint John shows us Mary as *woman*, wholly relative to Jesus, spouse of His heart; the bride is wholly relative to the bridegroom. At the foot of the Cross Mary lives that for which God wanted her to exist; she is the woman presented by the Father to Jesus, wholly relative to Jesus crucified, completing His holocaust.

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[26] Cf. Col. 1:24
[27] *Summa Theologica* III, q. 9, a. 2; q.34, a. 4.
[28] III, q. 7, a. 9.
[29] III, q. 7, a. 3 and 4.
[30] See (amongst others) III, q. 15, a. 10; *Compendium theologiae*, ch. 231
[31] 1Kings 18:38 ff.

Is this not the ultimate aspect of hope? If God asks us to live in hope amidst the greatest battles, extreme battles that are linked to those of the Cross, we should know that it is in order to accomplish, to complete the holocaust of the Cross, because by hope the deepest desires of our hearts can be offered to God, burned for God. That is what hope is. While we have not understood this we keep hold of our little projects, and our poor imitations of hope. All our projects, even our greatest ones such as doing something utterly new, as yet unheard-of, (the sort of desires we have around the age of forty, the 'political age' as Saint Thomas calls it) must be offered up. We want to achieve something important that has not yet been achieved, to complete Christ's work. But the complement to Christ's work is not exterior to His sacrifice, it is in fact *within* it; it is *in* Christ's sacrifice, and that is what God asks of us in hope. The fire of divine love, of the Holy Spirit, needs to burn all our plans so that we can know and live the hope of Mary's heart in the mystery of her Compassion. She offers her Isaac to the divine fire, He who is everything to her, He who is the masterpiece of the Holy Spirit and of herself. She offers Him, if God wishes to take Him, and to take Him in such circumstances as those of the Cross – that is to say, a sacrifice that is a failure in men's eyes. That is what is so difficult! When the sacrifice is something glorious in the eyes of men, than that makes up for it. But when the sacrifice is truly a failure in men's eyes, it is a different matter. To live a failure, to cooperate with a failure is not easy to accept. Of course, properly and deeply speaking Mary does not cooperate with a failure, but exteriorly she is the mother of He Whom they have crucified, the mother of He Whom they have rejected, Whom they cannot put up with any longer and Whom they want to be rid of at all costs.

Profoundly speaking and in reality, Mary is the spouse: *Sponsabo te mihi in misericordia … et sponsabo te mihi in fide*[32]. She espouses the intense desire of Christ's heart, which is to offer Himself as a victim of love. In offering Jesus as a victim of love to glorify the Father and to save us, she offers the deepest and most intimate desires of her heart to the Father. She accepts this state of poverty; she is a woman of poverty because she lives Christian hope in the most profound way. Christian hope takes on this modality at the Cross: Mary's heart espouses the wounded heart of Jesus, espouses the thirst of Christ's heart and thus she puts herself in a radical states of poverty. She has nothing left of her own for she has given everything: "From the daughter of Zion has departed all her glory"[33]. In giving up Jesus, Who is her only glory and her only hope, she has given more than herself. She has offered her hope that had been realized in Christ, her joyful hope, in order to enter into the hope of a woman of poverty who accepts to be led from now on by the Spirit of Christ, and to dwell after His Resurrection, after Pentecost, with John in order to be the hope of the Church – *vita dulcedo at spes nostra*. Mary is the hope of the Church in her unity with Christ's holocaust, with Jesus Who gives and offers Himself up. We need to discover how much this hope requires us to offer what is greatest in us, our most spiritual desires, even our desire for holiness: "For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren"[34]. Don't these words express Christian hope in their greatest form? We let another become more important than ourselves, out of love for the Father's will, so that the Father's will be fully and totally accomplished. Here we touch on the most divine exercise of Christian hope, which requires all that is most vital in us to be offered -- since it is in our desires that our spiritual life finds its best expression. This offering of the deepest desires of our heart is truly what Mary does in her mystery of Compassion; and she does it in order to glorify the Father, that is to say, in order to show that she is one with Jesus in His offering. Mary remains on earth with John in accordance with the Father's good pleasure. This does not mean that she no longer has any desires; she has an even greater desire, but a desire whose form she herself

[32] Cf. Hos. 2:19-20
[33] Lam. 1:6
[34] Rom. 9:3

does not want to determine, the desire of one who is poor. The desire of someone poor is precisely that of accepting that his very soul be nothing more than a desire handed over to the Father's good pleasure.

Do we not see here how Mary, at the Cross, lives the fulfillment of the Song of Songs? At first glance the Song of Songs seems to be the great book of love rather than of hope. But when we examine it in the light of the mystery of the Compassion, we can see that this mystery is truly the realization of the Song of Songs in Mary's heart. It expresses the greatness of her heart's desire and of her loving will. This is the desire of one who has received everything from God and who gives everything back to God; the desire of a creature divinized and transformed by grace, who wants to go as far as possible in unity of love with Christ's heart. By this, in her hope and faithfulness, Mary is a cause of joy (*causa nostra laetitiae* as the litanies say) for Jesus' heart. The Song of Songs surely invites us to contemplate the joy of Christ crucified: "Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon, with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, on the day of the gladness of his heart"[35]. Did not Jesus know, in the depths of His heart, the greatest joy of all His life at the Cross, when He saw Mary's faithfulness? She is present there, giving herself and receiving Jesus. We need to come back to this to share in the joy of the heart of Jesus, His ultimate joy. In fact, since Jesus grew in the experience of His heart right up to the end of His life, we can say that at the Cross He knows a unique joy, the "summit of his joy"[36]. At the moment when, humanly speaking he should have known the greatest despair, Mary, by her faithfulness, her hope and her love, is victorious in herself over all despair: she is standing at the foot of the Cross[37]. This victory in her is truly the proper fruit and manifestation of the great victory of Christ crucified over all death – over interior death (that of love and of the intelligence -- a contradiction) and over visible death, which cuts off man's earthly life.

"MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?"

In order to penetrate further into the mystery of hope that Mary lives at the Cross, let us try to understand the first of Jesus' seven words on the Cross, which only Matthew and Mark report: "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"[38] These are the words of Jesus living the mystery of the Agony on the Cross. In this agony Jesus is the Lamb and the scapegoat[39] who bears the iniquity of His people and of the whole world. He has carried all the faults of humanity, the faults of each one of us and He presents Himself to the Father as He Who is solely responsible: "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"[40], the Just One who out of love for man accepts to bear all the consequences of the faults of humanity. Jesus took the place of all sinful men and appeared before the Father as the only one responsible for all their faults, the consequences of original sin – "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all"[41]. So we understand why Jesus can say "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" The "why" expresses astonishment. We should put this "why" next to the "why" of the discovery in the temple: "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be busy about my Father's affairs?"[42] Here is the reply. "Why have you forsaken me?" – Because it is totally about the Father's affairs that He comes to save men and so to take their place before God, something that He alone can do.

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[35] Song. 3:11
[36] Cf. Ps. 137:6
[37] Jn. 19:25
[38] Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34
[39] Lev. 16:20-22
[40] Is. 53:3
[41] Is. 53:6
[42] Lk. 2:49

Jesus accepted to bear as a scapegoat all the consequences of sin. Now, the first and deepest consequence of sin is being separated from God, being aware in a terrible way that sin separates us from God. Jesus lived this in His human soul because He accepted being anathema for His brothers, that is, being separated from God. He accepted this, whilst at the same time, as we said above, enjoying in the heights of His soul, the Beatific Vision. Tradition (which is not only part of Revelation but is like the source of Scripture), has always considered the heights of Christ's human soul, a soul created by the Most Holy Trinity in the holy humanity of Christ, to be in the Beatific Vision. This is in no way contradictory to the fact that Jesus carried all the consequences of sin; on the contrary, this is what helps us understand how much Jesus suffered, because one suffers in the same measure that one loves. He who does not love very much does not suffer very much; why is it so difficult for us to love? Because deep down we are afraid of suffering. Jesus, seeing the Father face to face, can do nothing other than love Him madly by giving Him everything, and it is in this love that He bears the consequence of being, as it were, separated from Him, because He bears all the consequences of sin. St Catherine of Sienna, following St. Paul, accepted being anathema for her brothers. But we cannot say that too quickly! We can never say to someone, "I will go to hell out of love for you". No, our personal link with Jesus comes before our link with our neighbor. There is an *ordo caritatis*[43] that comes from God's wisdom and according to which we must live.

Jesus bore this separation, and Mary lives it in her faith, her hope and her love. "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" As we have said, this is where she is Woman, the one who is completely turned towards Jesus and lives the same mystery as He does. A bride is not truly spouse until she lives what the bridegroom lives, until she lives what is most intimately characteristic of the bridegroom's heart, until she carries it with and in him. This is what characterizes friendship-love: carrying out the same work as the friend. Why? So that the love we have for him becomes incarnate in us. Love is never uniquely spiritual – that is Platonism and we know what platonic love is: one says one loves but in reality one doesn't love at all. "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven"[44]. Jesus wants us to understand that someone who says, "I love you, I love you", and takes off as fast as he can as soon as a bit of suffering comes along, does not love. Love makes us vulnerable, but it also makes us strong.

Let us come back to the foot of the Cross in order to understand better the wholly divine hope that Mary lives at that moment. As we have seen, hope is a divine momentum that makes us strive towards beatitude. We are all made for perfect happiness, to see God and live as children of God; the virtue of hope exists in order to maintain in us a thirst for this perfect happiness. Hope allows us to look at the promise the Father makes us to treat us as His children, as His beloved sons and fellow heirs with Christ[45]. That is what is so marvelous; we look at he Father through Jesus, relying on Jesus, knowing that He has paid all our debts[46]. Even if we have behaved in the worst possible way, through Him we are "spotless"[47], for He has "washed us of our sins by His blood"[48]. This is Christian hope; this is Mary's hope. At the Cross, she sees Jesus bearing the sins of the world to the point of being in a way separated from God: "My God, my God why hast Thou forsaken me?" If Mary had received these words in a purely human way she would have fallen into the greatest despair. For He Who says these words is the One sent by the Father, and her only strength. She had given everything for Him, she was relying on Him alone for He was the Son of the Most High who had been given to her. He

[43] See *Summa Theologica*, II-III, q. 26, a. 4.
[44] Mt. 7:21
[45] Rom. 8:13; Gal. 3:29; 4:7; Col. 3:24 etc.
[46] Col. 2:14
[47] Apocalypse 14:5
[48] Apocalypse 1:5; cf. 7:14

had been given to her at the Annunciation and was given to her in a new, different way through the sacrifice of the Cross – this gift of His whole self, given for her … For Jesus died *for Mary*, in order to make her immaculate.

We should never forget that the Immaculate Conception is the most precious fruit of Christ's Cross. If the Immaculate Conception has been revealed to us in such a special way (the Church is being led by the Holy Spirit when she proclaims a dogma) it is because we need to understand more than ever the great victory of the Cross – that the Cross is totally victorious over sin, since the most precious fruit of the Cross is the Immaculate Conception.

Mary, when she is at the foot of the Cross, knows in her faith (in obscurity, therefore, but also in the certainty of faith) that her salvation is Jesus bearing the iniquities of the world. And Mary knows better than we do what the iniquities of the world are, for to know them it is necessary to love. One only knows evil when one loves, and if one stops loving, one no longer knows what evil is. Think of the book entitled "*Morality without Sin*" which made such a stir ten years or so ago. To speak of "morality without sin" allows everything: a criminal kills "without sin" if his sincerity leads him to kill a man whose presence is disagreeable to him. A "morality without sin" is a morality of sincerity. The devil is sincere when he does evil. One can be sincere and do evil because sincerity is not the truth. I would almost say that it is pride that makes us sincere, but it is perhaps more accurate to say that pride makes us reject the truth and put sincerity in its place. There are partial sincerities; we are all, with our good intentions, sincere but sometimes we prefer to remain in sincerity rather than seek the truth, because it is easier. In this way we make sincerity an absolute, whereas we need to go beyond it. Sincerity is not an absolute; it would be, if we were the measure of truth, the measure of good and evil as the devil wished us to think in the first temptation: "You will be like God, knowing good and evil"[49]. The devil is right when he says, "You will be like God", for God alone knows good and evil. This is why there is a very deep-rooted pride in us, wanting to follow sincerity and not look at truth.

Mary knows, then, in the obscurity of her faith that everything she has that is great and noble comes from the Cross of Christ. At the foot of the Cross, she is at the source of all that is great in her. It is the moment when she has both the greatest divine awareness of her radical dependence on the Father as a child of God and the greatest divine awareness of the unique gift that the Father makes her in giving her His Beloved Son in His state of supreme fragility and weakness. Jesus is more vulnerable at the Cross than He was as the tiny little child in Bethlehem; the fragility of Christ crucified, bearing the weight of the world's iniquities goes as far as making Him live in His human soul, a separation from the Father, being abandoned by the Father. In her faith and hope, Mary must bear this abandonment by the Father that Jesus lives in the depths of His heart, and yet she does not despair. If she had lived it humanly she would have despaired. Is it not a sight for despair for someone who had put all her hope in Jesus, to see the state He is in and to what He has been reduced? Not only has He been rejected by men, but even by God Himself, it seems; exteriorly, it would appear that the Father has rejected Him. Mary heard the mockery of the executioners: "If you are the Son of God, come down from the Cross!"… "He is the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the Cross and we will believe in Him!"[50] This is not Christian hope; it is human hope that relies on results – if you come down form the Cross we will believe in you. Mary's hope is the opposite: Mary's hope consists of going up to the Father and understanding that at the moment when He lives this total abandon, Jesus is carried in the depths of His heart by the Father's love for Him. For in obeying the Father, Jesus is One with Him: "Philip, he who sees Me, sees the Father"[51]. These words, spoken a

[49] Gen. 3:5
[50] Mt. 27:40-42
[51] Jn. 14:9

short while before the Cross, are truer than ever at the Cross. It is at the moment when He cries out, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" that Jesus reveals in the most striking way the Father's love for Him and for us. The Father can ask this of Him because His love for His Beloved Son[52] is a substantial love that surpasses all else, and that takes up everything anew from the interior. And Mary, in her faith as a little child of God, and in her hope as someone poor, receives the gift that the Father gives her of His Son in such an ultimate state of fragility. She can then love Him in an absolutely unique way.

There is a mysterious relationship between extreme poverty and love. In order to be able to love truly we need to be very poor; Jesus is the one who is poor *par excellence*. "The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me"[53]. If Jesus said this a few days before His Passion, it was because he was going to be hung on the wood of the Cross and know this divine abandonment: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" He really is, then, the one who is poor *par excellence*, and Mary receives Him in this ultimate state of poverty: she receives Him in the light of the Father, loving the will of the Father for Him and knowing that, precisely because He is in this extreme poverty, He is completely carried by the Father. Here we enter into the great mystery of divine paternity. At that moment, Jesus experienced in His man's heart, the paternity of His Father in an ultimate way, and Mary lived this experience with Him. She had an experience of a Father Who is nothing but love and Who can make use even of separation so that His love goes right to the very end, because divine love is substantial and is the source of all love. We cannot do this at the human level because human love is not substantial and is not the source of all love. The Father can do this for His Beloved Son, and Mary experienced it. She remained standing at the foot of the Cross; it was her pure hope and the certainty of this pure hope that kept her standing and enabled her to live in her faith the same abandon, the same annihilation, the same descent into an ultimate poverty – the poverty of seeming to be rejected, abandoned by the Father, as if the Father was paying no attention whatsoever to Him, as if the Father just left Him in His nakedness … "I am a worm, and no man"[54], thus completely stripped at the human level, stripped of His only support – the Father's love. For that is truly the only support for Jesus and for Mary, and they have seemingly been stripped of it.

Jesus lived all this in a blaze of love; it was a burning love that enabled Him to go as far as this in being abandoned and rejected. Mary lived it as spouse, in the obscurity of faith and the total poverty of hope. She lived this mystery of abandon, knowing that it was the most precious moment for Christ's soul and the summit, one might say, of the Father's love for Him. If the Father can ask this of Him it is because He loves Him substantially; the moment when Jesus lives this total abandonment is precisely the moment when the Father's love for Him touches the very depths of His soul, and most fully reveals itself as a substantial love. The Father's love is of course always substantial and source of life, but here it reveals itself as such in an ultimate, eschatological way. There is something very great in this that we can only live and experience under the breath of the Holy Spirit.

This totally divine exercise of hope is brought about thanks to the gift of Holy Fear. As we said above, it is thanks to this gift of Holy Fear that our hope can have a mode of exercise that is completely divine. For what does the gift of Holy Fear do? It puts us in a state of divine poverty. (Saint Augustine is the first to make this link between the gift of Holy Fear and the beatitude of the poor in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount.) What does it mean to hope as someone poor? Only the poor, in fact, truly hope, as we find throughout the Psalms. Why? Because the poor know that they are nothing before God, so they can open themselves up to His substantial mercy; they can

[52] Cf. Mt. 3:17 and 17:5; Mk. 1:11 and 9:7; 1 Pet. 1:17
[53] Jn. 12:8
[54] Ps. 22:6

open themselves up to the Father's paternal love and it is this love which takes hold of them so completely that they are "one" with Him. As long as we still have some sense of what we are and thus as long as we are not radically poor before God, there is always a little bit of the Pharisee in us, who is pleased with himself (we're not so stupid; we are still capable of loving; we have certain riches). In fact, we are all a little bit pleased with ourselves: we're not so bad, after all; there are many who are not as good as we are … We should not of course fall into the opposite extreme: "I'm just a nobody, way behind all the rest, I have absolutely nothing!" This is not true; humanly we always have some qualities. But before God, we are nothing because everything good in us comes from God: we have received everything from Him. Before God, therefore, we can be in that state of interior nakedness that is poverty; we have nothing of our own – all comes from God. It is very important to understand this because it radically puts an end to all jealousy. When we are truly able, under the breath of the Holy Spirit, to live in this absolute state of nakedness, we cannot be jealous any longer. If everything good that we have comes from God, and if everything good that our neighbor has comes from God, how can we be jealous of God's mercy? Are we going to be jealous that God makes someone poorer than us in order to give Himself to him? For one can only give oneself to someone poor.

So, the Holy Spirit acts in us and makes us see that before God we are nothing and that all we have that is good comes from God. We then place everything back into His hands and are completely abandoned, like the poor, "like a child quieted at its mother's breast"[55], like a small child completely abandoned, a little baby totally in His hands. "Unless you turn and become like little children you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven"[56]; therefore, if you do not enter this complete interior abandon, under the breath of the Holy Spirit, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. It is the beatitude of the poor that makes us enter the Kingdom of Heaven and this same beatitude of the poor that helps us know from the inside and live the paternal mercy that is given through the heart of Christ crying out, "My God, why hast Thou abandoned me?" We truly feel abandoned. We know that we are nothing, and we feel that God is keeping silent and does not care about us any more. But all these things are just impressions; in the depths of our faith we know that it is at the very moment when we are living this that the mark of God's love is strongest on us because then He can do what He wishes to do: we are entirely given over to Him. "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" At this moment the hope in Mary's heart is totally divine; it is the hope of a poor woman who has nothing left of her own, since her only treasure, Jesus, seems to be emptied of what was strongest in Him -- His link with the Father -- and He hands Himself over to her so that she lives the same mystery.

We need to contemplate the intimacy of Jesus' and Mary's heart in this supreme abandon, lived by Mary in a hope that is totally pure. By ourselves we cannot place ourselves in such a state, but we can ask for it; we ought to ask to know in the depths of our heart that total stripping of our whole self so that Jesus can do what He wants with us. In other words, we need to ask God to purify the Pharisee in us. A Pharisee is someone who is pleased with himself, happy to be what he is, and by the same fact, completely closed to mercy. Someone who lives a radical poverty, however -- because he puts himself in the place of the publican, who knows he is a sinner and is ashamed of his sin -- places himself entirely in the hands of the Father Who alone can save him. He knows that he cannot save himself by his actions, that only God can save him. Such a man is great in the eyes of God; to his own eyes he has accepted to be nothing and "less than nothing" because he is a sinner.

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[55] Ps. 131:2; cf. Hos. 11:4 "…and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws". One thinks also of what St Thérèse said at the end of her life: "Job's words, 'when God will slay me, I shall still hope in Him' [Job 13:15] have delighted me since me childhood, but it took me a long time to put myself in the same degree of abandon. I am there now; God has put me there, He has taken me in His arms and placed me there" (*Yellow Notebook*, 7th July)

[56] Mt. 18:3; Mk. 10:15

We understand, therefore, what Christian obedience is: it is living what Jesus lived on the Cross, no longer relying on ourself in any way. To rely on ourself, on our own strength and merits, on what we have done, is to limit God's mercy. We need to recognize that all this is the action of the Holy Spirit in us – it does not belong to us, it is *God in us*. So, if I might put it like this, let us travel as far as possible along that road of *God in us*. And *God in us* is He Who is our Creator, and more deeply still, our Redeemer, our Savior. We can then accept, as Mary did, and in her footsteps, to be totally stripped. This is something that cannot be spoken of – the poor do not speak. Someone who lives a radical poverty does not know himself. To know oneself is still a richness; not to know oneself is something greater! Not to know oneself is characteristic of someone poor: he does not know himself, and so leaves all the room to divine light, to the light of the Father, and he wants to see himself, from now on, only in the light of the Father.

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