



SAINT BENEDICT CENTER
Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary
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Feast Day of the Nativity
December 25, 2020

Dear Friends and Benefactors,

Pax Christi. As I sit down to pen this Christmas letter, several things are crashing into each other in my mind, all of them current events: (1) The “next wave” of the COVID-19 manipulation that is being used by petty tyrants all around the world to control their hapless populaces; (2) the U.S.-Presidential election fiasco which remains unresolved as I write; and, in the Church, (3) the anger and outrage caused by the recent release of the “McCarrick Report” — dealing with the decades-long career in perversity of the former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick — which many informed commentators are calling a whitewash and worse. This last is just the latest specimen of the seemingly unrelenting scandals in the Church.

Doubtless most of my readers are aware that beneath the surface of these three current events (and a whole host of related phenomena) are some genuinely insidious agendas. A common thread runs through them all, each of which will more or less affect us all both as citizens of the American Republic and as members of Christ’s Mystical Body. That common thread is THE BIG LIE. Lying and deception *on such a grand scale and with such serious ramifications* has a certain sulfurous smell to it that reveals its ultimate source. As Our Lord told His enemies during one of his most climactic confrontations with them:

You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and he stood not in the truth; because truth is not in him. *When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father thereof.* (John 8:44)

It is not my intention to go into detail on any of these three headline-stealing matters in this letter. Instead, I would like to focus on one virtue, one gift, and one beatitude that will help us retain our Catholic sanity amid these potentially maddening vicissitudes. They will even help us maintain some genuine Christmas joy when Advent — which we ought to spend in *real penance* — gives way to that beautiful Christian festival. After all, we don’t want to lose our proper liturgical outlook just because the world around us is going crazy.

The virtue is hope, the gift is fear, and the beatitude is poverty of spirit. They are intimately connected. Let me begin with the lovely traditional prayer, the “Act of Hope,” which we ought to say with some frequency:

O MY GOD, relying on Thy almighty power and infinite mercy and promises, I hope to obtain the pardon of my sins, the help of Thy grace, and Life Everlasting, through the merits of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Redeemer.

Just as it allows us truly to exercise the second theological virtue, this prayer teaches us at least three doctrinal lessons: (1) that without the virtue of faith (whereby we know of the divine promises of grace in this life and heavenly glory in the next), we cannot have hope; (2) that the infinite power and the mercy of God are the motives for our Christian hope; and (3) that, as Saint Thomas says, the virtue of hope has its “primary and secondary objects.” The primary object of hope is eternal life in heaven; but its secondary object is the divine assistance that we need in this life in order to be saved, referred to in the prayer as “the forgiveness of sins and the help of Thy grace.” Saint Thomas teaches us that we cannot hope for material things by this virtue unless those material things are in fact something helpful to our salvation. He also points out that we hope for ourselves only and not for other people — but with one exception: If we are joined to another by charity, that person is “another self,” and we can hope for him as we hope for ourselves and by that same theological virtue of hope. The Angelic Doctor likens this aspect of hope to the twofold quality of the theological virtue of charity whereby we love both God and neighbor with only one virtue. Similarly, with this second theological virtue we hope both for ourselves and for those to whom we are united by charity. This is a profound encouragement for those of us with fallen-away loved ones. If we are united to them by divine charity, we can make acts of hope both *for their and our* conversion and salvation.

In the times in which we live, unrest and incertitude are prevalent both in the Church and in civil society for all the reasons I touched upon at the beginning of this letter and more. In particular, the economic ruin suffered by many small business owners and wage earners thanks to the COVID-19 lockdowns has caused a spike in depression, anxiety, and consequent suicides. The atmosphere is heavy with the toxic fumes of despair. In light of this, we need to make frequent acts of hope, renewing *the supernatural purpose* of that virtue which does not put its trust in this world or its rulers but in God’s almighty power and infinite mercy. This will serve to assure us — amid the manifold heartaches, trials, and contradictions of this life — that we can and will certainly obtain a better life if we persevere and avail ourselves of God’s grace. In fact, based upon what mystical and ascetical theology teaches us, terrible trials can cause us to purify our hope of all the dross that can creep into it — including the consolations and comforts that help to prop us up — and bring us to hope only in God’s unfathomable mercy and omnipotence. Of course, we hope in the prayers of Our Lady and the saints as well as those of our Catholic brothers and sisters in the Church Militant, but only as instrumental causes working with the primary efficient cause of hope, *who is God alone.*

Concerning this matter of trials perfecting hope, Saint Paul had some things to say:

[W]e glory also in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience trial; and trial hope; And hope confoundeth not: because the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us. (Rom. 5:3-5)

For we know that every creature groaneth and travaileth in pain, even till now. And not only it, but ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption of the sons of God, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope. But hope that is seen, is not hope. For what a man seeth, why doth he hope for? But if we hope for that which we see not, we wait for it with patience. (Rom. 8: 22-25)

Patience, my Dear Readers, is the ability to suffer well.

There is a bad kind of fear that our visible and invisible enemies manipulate (*boy do they!*), but there is also a good kind of fear, the kind of fear we need. The virtue of hope is perfected by the gift of the fear of the Lord. This fear is not “mundane fear” (which is always evil) or even “servile fear,” which is good but imperfect. The fear which is a gift of the Holy Ghost is none other than “filial fear,” the supernatural reverence of God that fears to offend Him because He is so good and so worthy of our love. That fear is something that the Man-God Jesus Christ Himself possesses — even now in Heaven. It perfects hope by preventing it from becoming presumption. Hope reaches out to God while fear keeps us in reverent awe of our divine Father and Judge. And, while the virtue and gift of fortitude are the chief opponents of the base kind of fear that we see being manipulated by our enemies, there is a certain sense in which the wholesome fear of the Lord given us by the Holy Spirit serves as a remedy to base and unworthy fear. If nothing else, by it our fears are rightly ordered in accord with Our Lord’s admonition: “And fear ye not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him that can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28).

Saint Thomas Aquinas agrees with Saint Augustine in attributing the first beatitude to this gift of Fear of the Lord. In Saint Augustine’s words, “The fear of the Lord is befitting the humble of whom it is said: Blessed are the poor in spirit.”

If we are truly poor in spirit, we seek what our souls need from God alone, from whom all good things come, and not from ourselves or from any other mere creatures except as instruments in God’s hands. Thus the beatitude of poverty of spirit is a perfect, excellent, and delightful fruit that comes from the theological virtue of hope perfected by the gift of fear of the Lord.

Allow me briefly to return to the unpleasant “common thread” running through our current woes by asking two questions: What should we do in the face of THE BIG LIE? What should we do when confronted by all the hatred and malice that emanates from its black heart?

Here is a plan: By faith, hope, and charity, let us cling to what is true, good, and beautiful; have confidence that God does not abandon His own; be at peace; and let the chips fall where they may. Fear, anxiety, agitation — these are our enemy’s tools (along with lies). But we serve the Prince of Peace who has already overcome the world, and who tells us, on account of that, that we are to have confidence (cf. John 16:33).

Moreover, we must have the courage of our convictions to call the lie what it is, even if we get “fact checked” by professional media and social-media con artists, or even if the promoters of THE BIG LIE wear Roman collars and work in chanceries or in Catholic academe.

Before appending my signature to this Christmas letter, it is my pleasant duty to THANK all of our benefactors for your amazing generosity. Not only have you not abandoned the Brothers and Sisters at Saint Benedict Center during this time when we have been brutally maligned for fighting our Crusade for Catholic doctrine and the conversion of America, but you have even augmented your largesse. We owe you. And I speak for us all when I say that we will pay that debt with our fervent prayers and our continued loyalty to the Catholic cause to which we have consecrated our lives by vow.

We are also particularly grateful for the magnanimous support we have received for our agricultural endeavor known as “Project Isidore.” We will, in the coming months, give a progress report on that work so that you know your benefactions have borne good fruit: yes, literally! Thank you.

Lastly, from all the Brothers and Sisters here in Richmond, New Hampshire, I wish a fruitful Advent, a Blessed and Merry Christmas, a Happy New Year, and a Holy Epiphany to all our friends and benefactors. May the Prince of Peace and the Queen of Peace bring you that most precious commodity during these very unpeaceful times.

In the Immaculate Heart of Mary



Brother André Marie, M.I.C.M., Prior