

I come to you in the name of one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Hope. Hope is the message we hear from Paul's Letter to the Romans this morning. Hope is a driving force of Paul's commitment to ministering for Christ, for standing as the beacon of Christ's light still present in this world as the message of Christ, encouraging the work of the newly forming church, the total and complete giving of himself to a new kind of belief, a new hope. It is this hope that we hold onto as believers in Christ. Without hope, there is no faith for us, because our faith is based on a sense that the world is not as it should be, that Christ, God, Spirit, is not done with this creation. And it is this development of hope, a process that builds out of our experience in this life, our experience of faith, the process through which we stand against the cultural norms of our time, putting our faith before ourselves, and accepting the progression from suffering to hope, it is this development that Paul lays out before us today, that we must continue to come back to as we strive to have hope, see hope, and create hope for others in this world.

Hope is not simply created. We do not have hope simply because, we have hope because we have experienced the world in its fullest reality and still stand against it, wanting and demanding more. We boast of our hope, we boast of our sufferings, not because we have pride or vanity, because we have a desire to be more hopeful than someone else, to have suffered more, to be the most, extra, but rather we boast because we cannot help but be thankful for the grace of God that fills us, the peace of God which permeates us in that grace, and the hope that we can't help but feel, for ourselves, for this world, even in the face of suffering. For suffering builds endurance, and endurance builds character, and character builds hope, and through this, absorbing and transforming our

suffering, we find that place of hope that can only be found in faith, faith in the peace and grace of God, faith that God's love was made manifest when Christ died for us even while we were still sinners.

I consider myself an optimistic person. Sometimes cautiously so, but rarely do I ever feel that a situation cannot be turned around, rarely do I ever feel that someone's mind cannot be changed, rarely do I ever feel that anything other than optimism is how we should, perhaps even need, to approach this world, our existence. I have discovered this about myself as I've come to see problems, whether little things in our Church, or big things in our world, as solvable, at least if not by me, by someone. There exists in this world people who can solve the problems of this world. They may not all have been discovered, they may not all have even been born yet, but I do think that we can solve our problems. I believe this because I see good in every person. Even people who I personally struggle with, whether it be personal acquaintances or world leaders, I cannot help but feel optimistic that someone will have an impact on them, change their hearts (for world leaders I hope for change at least on the basic human rights stuff), or that people will rise up and prevent that person from doing further harm, whether it be within a small community or on the global scale. And, I have this optimism because of my faith. I know the message, the Good News, that is left for us, and I know that this message, this Good News, cannot help but change the world, if only we can get more people to hear it. This is why I'm so passionate about evangelism. This is a large part of why I became a priest. If the whole world were optimistic, not just about solving our problems, but optimistic about each other, then hope would prevail, and the Kingdom of God would be that much more realized here, now.

But, I understand why you might be a pessimist. I understand why many in our world are pessimists. There is pain, there is suffering, there is fear and hate and unrest and hurt in our world. This past week saw much of that pain come back to the surface. On Monday, we marked the one year anniversary of the Pulse nightclub shooting, where 49 LGBTQ peoples, and one very lost gunman, were killed in one of the largest single events of violence in our history, simply because they dared have hope that they could live the lives that they were created for. As the week progressed, news that a noted Sandy Hook Massacre denier, Alex Jones, (the fact that I had to write that phrase made me pause for a moment) was going to be given a national platform from which to spew fear and unrest, caused an outcry and questioning of what we demand of our media in times such as these. Then on Wednesday, on two different coasts, our complete addiction to gun violence was laid before us again, as two different shooters attacked people, one an angry man targeting those who lead the political party that he disagrees with, and the other an angry man targeting random victims, killing three and himself. And, these were just the shootings that made the news that day. With this news cycle, a news cycle that is both shocking and par for the course, it can be understandable why one might be a pessimist. And, this doesn't even begin to scratch the surface of those daily interactions, daily moments, that lead us deeper into pessimism, into fear, hate, unrest.

So, how can we maintain optimism, how can we push back against the pessimism of this world in these times? How can we not?

We have an eternal hope, an eternal optimism given to us through our faith in Christ, in our faith in the love of God that was put on display when Christ was crucified, for

all of our sins, even as we were the ones carrying out the death sentence. We need to ask ourselves, what about our faith must lead us, guide us, inspire us, to continue to be optimistic, to continue to see and have hope for this world, for each other. It is up to us to choose hope, to choose to be optimistic, even in the face of all of the suffering, all of the pain, all of the crap that is continually and constantly before us, both on our television (or computer) screens and in our less positive interactions with others every day. This is not a call to action. This is not a call to go out and spread the Good News with other. This is about accepting the promise that is our faith, and realizing what that can mean for us in our lives. This is about accepting hope, just as much as we accept God's love, for our lives, for this creation. This is about seeing the best in people, whether they be world leaders, strangers on the street, people in our office or school, friends, family (perhaps especially family), it is about seeing the best in each other, regardless of whether they (or we) live up to it or not.

If we start with this simple act, if we simply give in to optimism and expect the best rather than the worst, then we begin to live into that promise of hope that is found in our faith. It does take a radical shift of the mind to accomplish. It can be really easy to slip out of it. Even as an optimistic person, I still catch myself dismissing people outright, because of interactions with them, because of grudges I hold against that person. But, through the hope that I have, hope in the power of God's love to change not just this world but change individuals, I am forced to reconcile my pessimism about someone, I am forced to try and see the best in them, because that is what we are called to do, that is how we are called to change the world.

And, hopefully, when I catch myself, God can enact change in my heart as well. It's not like I'm a perfect human being. It's not like every person I dislike deserves it. It's not like every person I dislike even knows I dislike them. I hold the same anger in my heart that many of us are quite familiar with, but I don't want to. I don't want this anger weighing on me. I don't want this anger dictating how I interact with the world. Rather, I want to have hope, to trust in God's love, to follow the path laid before us by Christ, to be in communion with all, to see the best in all, to see the best in myself, even if they, even if I, do not live up to those expectations all of the time.

Our suffering produces endurance, endurance which produces character, character which produces hope. Without suffering there is not hope. We cannot experience one extreme without knowledge of the other. And with that knowledge we should push ourselves, those around us, this world, to reach for that hope. And with that hope, to see the world with optimism. To see the best in people, to see the best in ourselves, to see the best for this creation. We can accomplish this shifting of our hearts, because God's love has already been shown to us through Christ's death for us. We must boast of this reality. We must boast of our faith, faith that the peace and grace of God can and must change not just ourselves but this world. It starts with us, it starts with our hope, and with that hope, we can't help but see this world changed.

Amen.