

HOPE



What is hope?

Hope is a personal habit and a holy strength enabling us to imagine a dynamic future which faithfully gathers the facts and the sufferings of the present, drawing us towards a joy which warrants both the work and the waiting.

As a theological virtue, hope is the transformation of memory whereby our whole store of images from the past is fully infused with the image of God's presence. Many specific memories are lit as with the presence angels, others with the recognition of consequent joys which bloomed later, still others with images of those who have carried similar experiences into victory; finally and above all, our hearts are lit by the image of the Beloved with us in all events.

Hope is nourished by beauty, the orphaned transcendental. We live with the value of truth, because even our cars require us to deal with facts; we recognize the need for goodness because we hate and fear our wars. We discern that truth and goodness are the natural fulfillment of the basic faculties of the soul -- the intellect fulfilled truth and the will by goodness. Theologically, we know that the intellect is meant to be transformed by faith and the will by charity. But memory is not always called a faculty of the soul; animals have it, and since the Reformation, that great act of iconoclasm, beauty and imagination have been told to pay their intellectual wages or get out of the way. Yet St. John of the Cross says that in the "dark night" of the soul, reason is transformed into faith, *memory into hope*, and the will into love.

Many do believe that the soul has a third faculty, related to memory: creative imagination. This is the power of the composition of images which take their origin in particular events and locate their persistence in memory, but whose recounting is a deeper record than the past. Creative imagination is the work of the artist, whose wider and wilder landscapes bring a sudden stillness to the clamor of personal memory, a subtle alteration and lifting of consciousness, so that life is different afterwards, — not by a change in facts, which are in any case unalterable, but by a shift of their context and meaning.

As the creative imagination attains maturity, its work is beauty; beauty yields hope; and hope, infused with the Spirit of God, is the theological virtue by which we engage the divine promises as present life, though unseen.