



Dare We Hope? – Openness to God's surprises

Fr. Luis Ignacio Rois Alonso, OMI

Convocation 2024 – May 14, 2024

"Hope is our way of being in the Church. It is foundational in all that we believe. It carries us forward in mission.... This hope that we bear, in turn, brings hope into our own religious life and commitment." PHC IV.3.

Dare we hope? In reality, our immediate context does not invite much hope. We look at our world and contemplate the increase of injustices, crimes against humanity and against Mother Earth. Inequality and poverty are deepening and we hear the drums of war getting louder, the Pope speaks of the third world war in bits and pieces. We lose hope. Some despair as we look at the world and also as we look at our own Church and our charismatic family in certain regions. In this context, does it make sense to speak of hope? Does it make sense to ask Dare we hope?

You ask yourselves in this Convocation: "In OMI Lacombe Canada, our aging and diminishment is real. Called courageously to read the signs of our times, we know that difficult decisions regarding ministries and communities will have to be made in the near future. Where can we find hope within that reality? What grounds us, personally and communally? What might we dare to hope for together?"

This reminded me of our reflection on the presence of Oblates in the Sahara and in other places where our fragile situation seems to be in question. From my own small experience I'll try to present three paths that have helped me to continue walking as a pilgrim of hope at different times in my life. They are paths that we can explore to discover the calls of the Spirit in this context and in this time that is ours. They are paths walked by Jesus and his community of followers both men and women.

1.- Visiting Mary at the foot of the Cross

The experience of the cross was much more than a moment of crisis for the group that followed Jesus. All the messianic hopes they had harbored around him were buried in the scandal of the cross. Jesus was for them the awaited one, the one who would free them from oppression, the one who would initiate the Kingdom of God. He was also the one who had gathered them and called them together to become friends and followers, the one who had preached a new doctrine, the one who by his gestures had shown God's love for the most abandoned. But now, there He hung on a cross and died. The hope of Jesus' followers had died with him on the cross. The community was disintegrating. Disappointment, fear of the future and hopelessness had taken hold of them. The death of Jesus had passed the death sentence on his community and his project. Perhaps we can experience something similar when we face what is happening in our lives, in our Church, in our society, in our charismatic family.



convocation 2024

OPEN MIND - OPEN HEART - OPEN WILL

Once a Muslim friend of mine who had lost his wife after suffering from cancer and who was suffering because of this fact told me something that surprised me. Pointing to the cross on the top of the church, he told me: where the cross is, there is hope. It seems to me that it is the first place where we have to find hope. Our hope, in its most radical manifestation, is nourished by a failure, the death of the Innocent One. It is there that we recognize that God will speak his final and definitive word, making all things new. Our hope is rooted in the mystery of the crucified Redeemer who assumes in Himself all the crucified of history in order to raise them up with Him. Our hope is built by learning to look at our world through the eyes of the crucified one (C.4). Let us say that this way of looking at the world creates in us a contemplative attitude that leads us to action so that we, together with all the crucified, may also know the victory of the resurrection.

As we contemplate the crucified one, we see Mary at the foot of the cross. She is perhaps the only one of the group of Jesus' disciples who maintains hope against hope at that critical moment. John's Gospel says she "stood" and theologians and tradition teach us that this word reflects an attitude. She stood before the drama of all humanity, she was not defeated; before hatred she did not return insults or threats; before injustice, she did not respond with injustice; before violence she did not respond with violence; before the death of her Son, she suffered and wept, but she did not despair. Let us say that she reproduced in her the same attitude of her Son towards humanity: to give her life for love in coherence with the Gospel Jesus preached. And from this communion with Him, Mary gave birth to hope. Thus she became the mother of hope for all humanity, including us. In the face of the death of the innocent, she preserved the hope based in God and in God's final justice for all the victims.

I believe that today we are asked to seek an attitude, a way of being, if you wish a spirituality, that prolongs in history this attitude of Mary. Contemplating in communion with Jesus crucified and the crucified victims of our world and acting like Jesus and Mary in the face of so much injustice, to give a response that is a sign of hope. Contemplating also means participating in the sufferings of humanity, not living them from the outside as one who watches wars on television. Contemplating and acting from communion and learning how to hope from the poor, from the Victims and those who suffer.

Do we dare to hope by building a spirituality rooted in the event of Jesus on the cross and prolonging Mary's attitude?

2.- He descended into hell.

What happened between the evening when Jesus died on the cross and the morning of the third day when the disciples discovered him Risen from death? In the profession of faith we say that Jesus descended into hell. A group of theologians and pastoralists very involved in social issues have made a reflection on this that I consider interesting for our mission. A mission that embraces the spirituality of Holy Saturday. On the day when the community disintegrates in despair, Jesus "occupies himself" in descending into hell to announce the Good News there too, as the precious patristic reading of the Office of Readings of Holy Saturday relates.



convocation 2024

OPEN MIND - OPEN HEART - OPEN WILL

Accompanying young people trapped in the circle of drug addiction, how many times have I heard them and their families say, this is hell. I have heard the same expression from people suffering from severe bouts of depression: a woman once told me that she didn't know what hell would be like but it couldn't be worse than what she was experiencing. How many times have we heard victims of war, sexual abuse or violence say "this is hell". We have also heard it in the face of natural catastrophes and we will hear it if we are sensitive to hear the groans of mother Earth. And so many situations that are perhaps not so far from us, perhaps closer than we can imagine.

Hell is not a place, it is a state that we could describe as no faith, no hope, no love, no God. And Jesus descended there to be with those in hell. He descended to announce the Good News in that situation of no faith, no hope and no love. He descended to light a small ray of God who does not forget any of his creatures. Like Jesus, in order to resurrect, we too must "descend" into hell. These are the hells in which so many people and many peoples live, where faith is absent or on the verge of being extinguished, where hope is absent or on the verge of being extinguished, where love is absent or on the verge of being extinguished. Perhaps we can redefine our mission from this perspective. Perhaps this can help us to abandon places of comfort, to abandon paths already walked that no longer serve us, to abandon convictions or ideologies that do not lead us to those to whom Jesus entrusts us today. Perhaps this "descent into hell" will help us to dare to hope only in God and his definitive project for humanity, to simply try to collaborate with Him, not busy with our own problems as if they were the only important thing.

Do we dare to hope by living a mission that descends to those who live in hell in our days?

3.- Recapitulation: reading reality from the end of history.

It is not easy for us to interpret the signs of the times and to have the Father's view of the world and the history. It is not easy to make discernment and yet we need it. We need to start listening to our brothers and sisters, to Mother Earth, to history. At the same time, we must also be attentive to the Spirit that manifests itself in us, in the poor, in the Church. A synodal listening is very much needed. Often we do not know what we have to do today, in the present. We know that the past helps us if we wisely learn from it, but it can also slow down our steps if we remain locked in nostalgia or self-referentiality.

In discernment we cannot forget what we know about the end of the history. This will help us to read our situation and make bold decisions with hope. In the Scriptures we are told about the end of the story and this is a place to explore to ground our hope. We are used to reflecting on the universal judgment of Jesus developed in Matthew 25: I was hungry, thirsty, etc. and you helped me. I think this helps us flesh out what we explored in the previous point of the missionary descent into hell. For us believers, this end of history has already begun with the resurrection of Christ. In Christ God is making all things new (Rev 21:1-6). St. Paul expresses that God's plan for history consists in the recapitulation in Christ of everything created in heaven and earth (Eph 1:9-10). Jesus Christ is transforming everything with that energy He has to submit everything to him (Phil. 3:20-21) and because in him resides all fullness (Col. 1:19; Eph. 3:19) he brings all creation to its fullness so that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28).



convocation 2024

OPEN MIND - OPEN HEART - OPEN WILL

Our Constitutions and Rules state that our communities are prophetic signs that offers grounds for hope to the world in its search for integrity and harmony (C. 91). They also say that in community we await together the coming of the Lord in the fullness of his justice so that God may be all in all (C. 11). This becomes true when we live the Gospel and proclaim it from and in community. It is true when we live the values of the Kingdom in community. Therefore, in our present day, we have to make every effort to reinforce the evangelical quality of our community life. And in this we have to make a great effort, not without tensions, to come closer to the ideal desired in our Oblate charism and expressed in the Constitutions and Rules. This, for me, is a missionary urgency and not an institutional survival strategy. We need communities that live the Gospel, that are open to the poor and with them announce the Good News of the Kingdom. In these communities, the laity who share our charism and the poor whom we serve must occupy a central place, together with Jesus Christ and his Word, in discerning with hope what we have to do. In these communities we learn to discern together the inspirations of the Spirit who invites us to dare with hope to be what we are: missionaries to and with the poor in community.

Do we dare to hope by living in evangelical communities centered on Jesus and the poor that incarnate our missionary charism today?

C. 11 could help us to put flesh on all these thoughts and journeys we are making to find hope and to be at the same time sowers of hope in our world. We find hope only if we become sowers of hope.

C.11 "Our mission is to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to seek it before all else (cf. Mt 6: 33). We fulfil this mission in community; and our communities are a sign that, in Jesus, God is everything for us. Together we await Christ's coming in the fullness of his justice so that God may be all in all (cf. 1 Cor 15:28). Growing in faith, hope and love, we commit ourselves to be a leaven of the Beatitudes at the heart of the world".

I believe that this is what it is all about if we want to be pilgrims of hope in communion.

Some questions for conversation in the Spirit:

1. What paths of spirituality can we walk together to find and sow hope in our world? We can agree on two or three of our spiritual values in which to deepen in the coming years.
2. What paths of mission do we feel that the Spirit is indicating to us in order to descend into hell and announce the Good News? We can agree, from our Oblate values, on two or three missionary dimensions on which to concentrate in the coming years.
3. What evangelical community should we build in order to be prophets of hope in our world? We can choose, from our Oblate values, two or three dimensions on which to work in the coming years

Luis Ignacio Rois Alonso, OMI
Superior general