

Revised New Jerusalem Bible © 2019 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd

## Meditatio

In the epistle to the Hebrews, a strange and beautiful letter, we read these famous words: 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the conviction of realities that are unseen' (Heb 11:1).

In his encyclical *Spe salvi*, Pope Benedict XVI spoke of this passage as revealing something important about Christian hope: namely, our hope is not in something vague and indefinable. Strangely, despite hope being oriented towards the future, Christian hope is also hope in something that has already been given to us. In today's Gospel, this becomes personal and concrete when the angel tells Joseph that Mary's child is 'Emmanuel' — God is with us. It is precisely because God is a real presence in our midst, like the pillars of fire and smoke that led the Israelites out of Egypt, that we can have true hope.

That line also reveals something else to us: if we want to renew our hope, we must deepen our faith, for faith is the substance of hope, its basis and foundation. If we do not know Jesus Christ, if we do learn to live in his presence — especially his presence as given to us in the Eucharist — then how can we expect to become pilgrims and witnesses of hope for others? When we do, our lives becomes a witness and proof of that which is unseen.

Pope Benedict XVI explains it well:

Faith is not merely a personal reaching out towards things to come that are still totally absent: it gives us something. It gives us even now something of the reality we are waiting for, and this present reality constitutes for us a "proof" of the things that are still unseen. Faith draws the future into the present, so that it is no longer simply a "not yet". The fact that this future exists changes the present; the present is touched by the future reality, and thus the things of the future spill over into those of the present and those of the present into those of the future.

Faith gives life a new basis, a new foundation on which we can stand ... This new freedom, the awareness of the new “substance” which we have been given, is revealed not only in martyrdom, in which people resist the overbearing power of ideology and its political organs and, by their death, renew the world. Above all, it is seen in the great acts of renunciation, from the monks of ancient times to Saint Francis of Assisi and those of our contemporaries who enter modern religious Institutes and movements and leave everything for love of Christ, so as to bring to men and women the faith and love of Christ, and to help those who are suffering in body and spirit. In their case, the new “substance” has proved to be a genuine “substance”; from the hope of these people who have been touched by Christ, hope has arisen for others who were living in darkness and without hope. In their case, it has been demonstrated that this new life truly possesses and is “substance” that calls forth life for others. For us who contemplate these figures, their way of acting and living is de facto a “proof” that the things to come, the promise of Christ, are not only a reality that we await, but a real presence: he is truly the “philosopher” and the “shepherd” who shows us what life is and where it is to be found ... [Christ] has already communicated to us the “substance” of

things to come, and thus the expectation of God acquires a new certainty.'

Spe salvi §7-9

## Oratio

Spend some time now in conversation with the Lord.  
Respond to his Word.

Where has your prayer and meditation led you? What questions or desires do you want to bring before God? Bring them now. Feel free to use the journaling space on the first page to help you pray

## Contemplatio

Pope Benedict XVI said that this step of contemplation (contemplatio) is the time of taking up ‘as a gift from God, his own way of seeing and judging reality ... forming within us “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16)’ (Verbum domini §87). Spend some time resting quietly in God’s presence, asking for the gift of his heart and mind.

## Actio

If you are in a group setting, discuss your thoughts and meditations from your time in prayer. Towards the end of your time together, focus especially on how your prayer might lead to action, to greater witness. If this is an individual exercise, journal your thoughts and resolutions here.