Grieving with Hope

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)
November 8, 2026
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During the first two days of November, the Church celebrated two important feast days dedicated to our beloved dead. First, All Saints Day for those who are now in heaven and second, All Souls Day for the many others who have passed from this world and go largely unnamed, yet remembered in the mind of God and in the memories of their family and friends. Both feasts set the tone for the entire month of November. Throughout the rest of this month, along with praying for all those who have died, we are also invited to be sensitive to those who are grieving the loss of a loved one. As we know, the holidays are not always a pleasant experience for all.

Grieving the death of a loved one is an inevitable experience. Whether it was a slow death we saw coming for years or a sudden death because 'no one knows neither the day nor the hour,' all of us will be hurt by the experience of death, likely more than once in our lifetimes. It is in this context that the words of our second reading from First Thessalonians offer us consolation. St. Paul writes, "we do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope." For St. Paul, the theological virtue

of hope is the secret to keep us moving forward. It may not take away the hurt or grief, but it can sustain us even in the worst of it.

In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI wrote an encyclical letter on hope. In the first lines of it, he offers us the following encouragement: "the present, even if it is arduous, can be lived and accepted if it leads towards a goal, if we can be sure of this goal, and if this goal is great enough to justify the effort of the journey."[1] In other words, as long as we still know our purpose, even when it is covered with doubt, sorrow, and tears, we have hope. Interestingly, also right at the beginning of this encyclical, Pope Benedict references a person who lived with hope, even when faced with a nearly impossible situation. It is none other than St. Josephine Bakhita, our patron. Pope Benedict writes, "now she had 'hope' —no longer simply the modest hope of finding masters who would be less cruel, but the great hope: 'I am definitively loved and whatever happens to me—I am awaited by this Love. And so my life is good.'"[2] To compare this to our Gospel passage for this weekend, St. Josephine Bakhita was like one of the wise virgins. She did not have to panic like the foolish ones when the bridegroom arrived unexpectedly at midnight. She was ready and waiting. She knew she had a goal and purpose. No amount of abuse or childhood trauma was going to take away her ability to move forward.

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[1] Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 1.
[2] *Ibid* 3.

Hope is the ability to know one's purpose, even in challenging times.

What is my purpose at this stage of my life? What gives me hope, even if it is small in comparison to my problems and the problems of the world?

As we continue with this mass, let us pray that we may be a community of hope. May we support each other in times of grief and pray for our beloved dead. May each of us know that 'we are definitively loved and whatever happens to us— we are awaited by this Love…our lives are good.' Therefore, console one another with these words.