

THE REASON FOR HOPE

*By Very Reverend
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Ahhh ...
December.
The crisper
air ... the
quiet beauty
of snowfall
... the anticipation of
Christmas and holidays
with family and friends
just around the corner.
It's a time when those
who love to go shopping
revel in the quest for
those perfect gifts ...
and when we who hate
to go shopping rejoice
in Amazon.com and
the choices and brevity
afforded by the vast
internet marketplace.
And, most of all for
Christians, there is the
very "reason for the
season": the celebration
of the birth of Jesus
2000-ish years ago
... "For a child is born

to us, a son is given
us; upon His shoulder
dominion rests. They
name Him Wonder-
Counselor, God-Hero,
Father-Forever, Prince
of Peace." (Isaiah 9:5)

We all need hope
in our lives. A news
story just the other
day remarked at how
the suicide rate is at

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a historic high—a fact
which itself points to a
tragic and unnecessary
loss of hope. For
animals the survival
instinct is itself enough,
but not for we humans.
With the ability for
abstract thought of
the future, if we do not
immediately perceive

improvement IN that
future, we can easily
despair and, in worst
case, contemplate self-
destruction as a false
"escape". Sadly, such an
wrong "escape" will be
a lifetime of agony and
sorrow for family and
friends left behind.

Of course, many such
persons have difficulties

such as depression,
great sorrows in their
lives, etc., which may
become exacerbated in
a season naturally filled
with joy, but a joy which
they feel they cannot
"tap into". But, my dear
such friends ... know
that time really DOES
heal all wounds, and

we are not only blessed
with diminishing
memory of past sorrows,
but we never know what
amazing and exciting
opportunities the future
holds.

But a key to that
diminishing memory
is to not keep ripping
open the wound!
Certainly, it is admirable
to remember the love
and virtues of a person
we've lost—and even
their faults if it helps us
to improve ourselves—
but to continually linger
upon that which cannot
return is self-defeating
at very best ... self-
destructive in its worst.
A person who loved
you would certainly not
want his loved ones left
behind to be constantly
wasting away at his/her
loss, but would rather
encourage him/her: go
out and LIVE! Carpe
Diem!...Seize the day!
Find joy in all the

wonders and God-given things around us: friends and family, a bracing cold snowy morning, the beauty of that mountain snowfall. As the hero Gus said in the mini-series "Lonesome Dove" to young Lorie, who was lamenting her life and disappointments: "Lorie darlin', life in San Francisco is still just life. If you want any one thing too badly, it's likely to turn out to be a disappointment. The only healthy way to live life is to learn to like all the little everyday things, like a sip of good whiskey in the evening, a soft bed, a glass of buttermilk, or a feisty gentleman like myself!"

I often urge those who are down and depressed: Don't take the problems of life personally! Inevitable rain falls, and "rolling with the punches" of life leads to a much greater happiness than demanding that fate always give us our own way. If a desired path is blocked, well...climb over!...or go another way! And regarding life's difficulties and trials as challenges to be overcome rather than "unfair" tragedies gives us confidence, strength and purpose. With those, even the non-Christian, the non-religious can find hope—in conquering that next challenge coming down the pike. This isn't just a hackneyed

platitude; it's something I have both witnessed and experienced many times.

Will there be failures? Well ... yeah!! Failures are inevitable ... but each is a learning experience for overcoming the next challenge ... and gives each of us opportunity to pass on the knowledge we gain to help someone else get over the same obstacle just a little bit easier ... a little bit quicker. That boosting of others is the joy of teachers, professors and mentors everywhere.

For example, have you ever watched a nature show on young animals learning to hunt? Early attempts are clumsy and repeated failures. But with each failure they learn a little bit more ... get a little bit better ... until they soon are master huntresses teaching their own little ones. This teaching of the next generation is a very duty of our existence.

And, of course, we Christians look always to Jesus Christ as guide, hope, the fulfillment of life. Yes, God longs for us to live in virtue and according to what He has taught through scripture and, we Catholics believe, through the Church. Yet some persons erroneously despair at their past, feeling unworthy to come to Him. But we need only read the Prodigal Son parable in Luke 15 to know absolutely that God

waits longingly for us to come back down the road to home ... to Him ... by living the life He has taught us: loving Him, and loving neighbor. This is the pinnacle of joy of both Him and us ... with our ultimate joy being to serve Him and each other until HE—in HIS perfect time—calls us home to Himself.

***"For thou lovest all things that exist, and hast loathing for none of the things which thou hast made, for thou wouldst not have made anything if thou hadst hated it. How would anything have endured if thou hadst not willed it? Or how would anything not called forth by thee have been preserved? Thou sparest all things, for they are thine, O Lord, who lovest the living."* (Wisdom 11:24-26 RSV)**

