I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his people" Ephesian 1:18 NIV

November 10th The Shofar HOPE

Christ is a different kind of High Priest

In the letter to the Hebrews we are provided with the source of Hope, Hope with the power to transform human life, to make this world not only a better place in which to live, but a world that is restored to being the one envisaged by the Creator God from the very beginning.

While the High Priests of Judaism annually went behind the curtain in the Temple to appear before God, they could not eradicate the impact sin continued to have on the lives of God's people. Over and over again they made that liturgical trip and nothing changed. With Jesus the High Priest we have a whole new paradigm, one not based on human hands, human powers. The significant difference is that we no longer have a physical Temple, or an earthly Holy of Holies. Jesus our High Priest stands in the Heavenly Temple, at the very throne of God *that he might now appear before God <u>on our behalf</u>*. Therein is the root of Christian Hope. This is why we can Hope.

We all face difficult moments of darkness and anxiety when things can become difficult. Frightening, even. Some, maybe many may become disillusioned with life and lose hope. Sadly, it is during these challenging times, Hope can also be misunderstood and a valuable tool in restoring life and our world goes untapped.

Hope has nothing to do with human words or assurances. Hope is founded firmly on God's Word and His promise of salvation and eternal life. The great effect of Jesus' Resurrection is the opening of heaven for humanity.

The Theological Virtue of Hope

Hope is perhaps the most difficult of the three theological virtues to understand. It can be described as an unshakable trust and assurance that the promises of God will be fulfilled. This trust is based on what He has done for us in His Son Jesus, through His Death and Resurrection. Like faith, it is not a human attitude or opinion. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

A simple catechism understanding of Hope would read: Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Spirit.

God created us with a desire in our hearts and a longing for true and enduring happiness. St Augustine put it this way, *You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.* This is a yearning inseparable from our humanity, a yearning we can only fulfil through union with God in Christ Jesus.

It is the virtue of Hope that responds to this innermost desire and helps us to place our trust in God. It takes our desires, our ambitions and the daily pursuits of our lives and orders them towards the Kingdom of God, the Reigning of Christ on earth and in heaven. In so doing we are spared the anguish of disappointments, discouragement and feelings of abandonment.

Hope opens our hearts in expectation of eternal beatitude, blessings found now, here on earth and forever with God beyond the grave. This buoys up our lives, empowering us to avoid selfishness and the pursuit of deadening pleasures and activities. Instead, the man and woman strengthened by Hope, reaches out beyond passing darkness to share the joy that comes with the sacrificial loving of others. What a response to our moments of darkness! What an antidote to depression! When darkness, depression and feelings of helplessness strive to draw us down, we reach out from our darkness to show light and life to those who may not even know God. In other words, the most valuable gift we can bring to the world in which we live is to infuse it with God's gift of Hope. That is a divine Hope, one accessible only in God,

We cannot prove Hope is real

Jesus used the image of the kingdom of God to express the content of our hope. He used parables, images, and symbols to describe what is eternal and invisible to the human eye. St. Paul declares*, Now hope that sees for itself is not hope. For who hopes for what one sees?* **(Romans 8:24**). This gift of the Holy Spirit helps us envision what still cannot be seen and which would otherwise be impossible to expect. Viewing the world around us, our lives and human history through the lens of Hope enables us to see and find comfort in those heavenly realities that remain hidden from those without faith.

Here is why Hope is such a powerful force in human living. For St. Paul, Hope is a person, it is Christ Himself. It is more than simply a desire for the joys of eternal life. It is, rather, a desire to be with Jesus, to discover the Joy of knowing Jesus is alongside of us, within us here in our present life. It is also reassuring us that we are destined to be with the Lord forever. This is the heart's deepest desire, even more profound than its desire for life itself **(1 Thessalonians 4:17).** If we can understand this, we can understand why those early Christian martyrs were so willing to die dreadful deaths in the name of Christ. Their death was not the end, for in dying their lives were changed, not ended.

This driving force to Christian living grows from our sincere love of Jesus. St. Paul assures us of this in the most magnificent language: *I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord* **(Romans 8:38-39).** It is this assurance of the love and presence of Jesus and His Father that allows anyone who is suffering to find encouragement and comfort. Our Hope does not depend on us having our darkness and pain taken away from us. It is about finding the strength and consolation of Jesus (who himself suffered greatly) who is within us in those moments of struggle. He is the ever-present reminder that what we endure now is nothing alongside the eternity of blessings. Jesus Himself, and His love for each of us, is the reason for our Hope. Death did not defeat him. He rose as the firstborn, and he invites us to share in that rising.

Life without Hope is endless darkness

No one can truly and fully live without Hope. Only angels do not need hope, for they do not live in time and have no future. But we creatures of time are constantly moving into the future, and our eyes are usually facing forward. Hope is like headlights. It is not easy to drive without headlights in the dark. But with the divine light that is Hope, while we may not be able to destroy darkness, we can overcome it.

Hope is the forgotten virtue of our time because Hope real Hope, the theological virtue of Hope, as distinct from the vague sentiment of wishing, or mere optimism means taking on the reality God, a spiritual, a transcendental aspect of human living in a world that will one day end. Hope is never going to exist in an environment that rejects the idea of God, of spiritual realities. While people can see nothing beyond the grave, Hope is limited to what they can achieve in this life, through human effort. An objective assessment of history over the last hundred or so years quickly highlights the limits of that kind of optimism for the future.

The New Testament appeals to heavenly Hope on nearly every page. It is continually reminding us that our citizenship is in heaven. Modernity sees this as escapism and wishful thinking. It is foolish/

The concept of Hope has been desparingly trivialized by the modern mind, just as the concept of faith has been. As "I believe" usually means merely I feel, so I hope usually means only I wish or wouldn't it be nice if…. But Christian Hope, the theological virtue of hope, is not a wish or a feeling; it is a rock-solid certainty, a guarantee, an anchor. We bury our dead in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection. Feelings are subject to every wind of chance and change. But Christian Hope has a foundation. It is a house built upon a rock, and that rock is Christ. The hopes and fears of all history are met on that Easter Sunday morning when Jesus rose gloriously from the grave and it is in His victory our Hope resides, and that Hope never fades. Never fails. Thus, we Christians have the enduring panacea for which the world unknowing yearns – Hope.