

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT 2024

PILGRIMS OF HOPE

Towards Jubilee 2025

BLESSED IS SHE



The Gospel

Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord" (Luke 1:39-44).

Luke's Gospel begins with two annunciation (announcement) stories and two births that will change all history. The Holy Spirit is present in the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth, as, in Elizabeth, the Old Testament recognises the hope of the New Testament, in Mary. Two generations, strong in faith, hope, love and trust, embrace each other. Both recognise that something extraordinary is happening in a very ordinary event — the quickening of an unborn child in the womb. This meeting of two mothers emphasises the truth that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, has placed all her hope and all her trust in God, who has done great things for her. The scene is set for the stories of birth.

FOR 'EVERYDAY PILGRIMS'

From Pope Francis' announcement of the Jubilee Year 2025.

Hope, together with faith and charity, makes up the triptych of the "theological virtues" that express the heart of the Christian life (cf. 1 Cor 13:13; 1 Thess 1:3). In their inseparable unity, hope is the virtue that, so to speak, gives inward direction and purpose to the life of believers. For this reason, the Apostle Paul encourages us to "rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, and persevere in prayer" (Rom 12:12). Surely we need to "abound in hope" (cf. Rom 15:13), so that we may bear credible and attractive witness to the faith and love that dwell in our hearts; that our faith may be joyful and our charity enthusiastic; and that each of us may be able to offer a smile, a small gesture of friendship, a kind look, a ready ear, a good

deed, in the knowledge that, in the Spirit of Jesus, these can become, for those who receive them, rich seeds of hope. Yet what is the basis of our hope? To understand this, let us stop and reflect on “the reasons for our hope” (cf. 1 Pet 3:15) (*Francis, Spes Non Confundit*, # 18).

Christian hope does not deceive or disappoint because it is grounded in the certainty that nothing and no one may ever separate us from God’s love: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or the sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us ...” ... this hope perseveres in the midst of trials: founded on faith and nurtured by charity, it enables us to press forward in life (*Pope Francis, Spes Non Confundit*, # 3).

FROM PILGRIMS OF THE PAST

- **Consult not your fears but your hopes and your dreams.** Think not about your frustrations, but about your unfulfilled potential. Concern yourself not with what you tried and failed in, but with what it is still possible for you to do. *Attributed to Pope John XXIII.*
- **Do not be troubled or weighed down with grief.** Do not fear any illness, vexation, anxiety or pain. Am I not here who am your mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not your fountain of life? Are you not in the folds of my mantle? In the crossing of my arms? *Our Lady of Guadalupe.*
- **Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;** where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy. *St Francis of Assisi.*

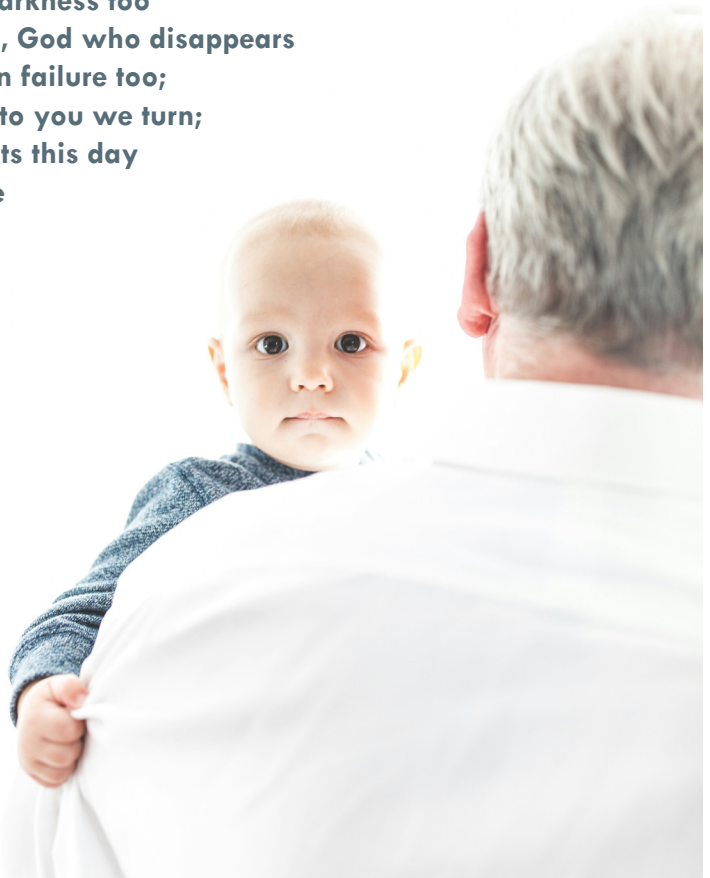
FOR THINKING AND PRAYING

- **What words stand out for you?**
- **What insights might you take with you on your own life ‘pilgrimage’?**

A PRAYER

God of our beginning and our end
God of all the times in our life
God in despondency, God in ecstasy
God in light and in darkness too
God who exhilarates, God who disappears
God in success and in failure too;
God you are our all, to you we turn;
Engender in our hearts this day
A peace-filled silence
when we pray.
Amen.

D. Harrington & J. Kavanagh,
Prayer for Parish Groups, 106



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Acknowledgements: *Pope Francis, Spes Non Confundit, Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025*, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/bulls/documents/20240509_spes-non-confundit_bolla-giubileo2025.html; *Father Timothy Radcliffe OP*, Synod Retreat Meditation, 'Hoping Against Hope', October 1 2023, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2023-10/retreat-day-1-radcliffe-first-meditation.html>; *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, <https://catholicism.org/brmichael-guadalupe.html>; *Peace Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi quoted at:* https://www.ballarat.catholic.org.au/wp-content/_uploads/nwart/files/Diocese%20News/Peace_Prayer_to_St_Francis_of_Assisi.pdf
Donal Harrington & Julie Kavanagh, Prayer for Parish Groups: Preparing and Leading Prayer for Group Meetings, The Columba Press: Blackrock, Co Dublin, 1998.