

SUNDAY PLUS

Hope, and spread hope

What is hope?

By Paul Higginson

It has been said that people are often motivated by either fear or hope. In the Church of the past, fear was often a primary driver of faith: "believe this, do that and you will be saved".

However, since Vatican II, this has been replaced by a theology of hope, involving relationship and "metanoia" (a transformative change of heart).

This Christmas Pope Francis will inaugurate Jubilee 2025 with the theme "Pilgrims of Hope". What exactly is hope? In a sense it's a vision for better days, and in today's Gospel we hear about the Lord filling in valleys and making crooked roads straight.

On our pilgrimage through life God makes "the rough ways smooth". Sharing our sorrows and joys, he is our constant guide and encourager, picking us up when we fall and loving us unconditionally. John the Baptist proclaims a God who comes to heal us, not to punish us. However, hope is not just a vision for the future - it needs repentance and a change of heart in the present. And if hope is to thrive, it must be spread and shared. In the words of Pope Francis, "hope is meant for everyone... it grows by being given away".

When so much of our world is beset with fear, may our journey through Advent be a journey of hope, echoing St Paul's prayer: "May the God of hope bring you such joy and peace in your faith that the power of the Holy Spirit will remove all bounds to hope."

Paul Higginson is a retired teacher and author of Doing Christianity: How religion is about what you do, not what you believe.

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Jubilee 2025:
Pilgrims of Hope



The Jubilee logo

Whoever you are, whatever you do and wherever you live, life isn't always easy and straightforward. That's why we need each other. Isolation isn't good for anyone, especially when the going is rough. For Christians, our anchor is the cross, holding out the hope of safety as we travel together on life's stormy waters. Jesus isn't distant. He doesn't leave us alone but comes towards us with his arms wide open to give us the hug that we so often need. We are all pilgrims, pilgrims of hope, travelling in hope towards Jesus, whom we know loves us more than we can possibly imagine.

Hope into reality

By Sr Janet Fearn FMDM

Many years ago, when visiting the spinal unit in an Australian hospital, I walked past the gym. "Bluey", a young man with a severe spinal cord injury, had been told he would never walk again following his motorbike accident. However, he'd recently been selected to try experimental equipment which, predating today's computerised technology, was heavy, bulky and unsightly. Scientists hoped that, strapped to Bluey's legs, the apparatus might

transform immobility into mobility. He'd had to train hard to build up sufficient physical strength and this was the great day. Dripping with perspiration from the effort and leaning heavily on crutches, Bluey was walking! He managed about twenty paces whilst staff – and I – watched in amazement and joy. It was an incredible moment in which hopes and dreams came true. For sure, the scientists are still working on and refining their project, but Bluey showed that hope can become reality.

Sr Janet Fearn is a Franciscan Missionary of the Divine Motherhood.

May your grace transform us into tireless cultivators of the seeds of the Gospel. May those seeds transform from within both humanity and the whole cosmos, in the sure expectation of a new heaven and a new earth when, with the powers of Evil vanquished, your glory will shine eternally.

The Jubilee Prayer

Today:
Baruch 5:1-9
Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11
Luke 3:1-6

Monday:
Genesis 3:9-15, 20
Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12
Luke 1:26-38

Tuesday:
Isaiah 40:1-11
Matthew 18:12-14

Wednesday:
Isaiah 40:25-31
Matthew 11:28-30

Thursday:
Isaiah 41:13-20
Matthew 11:11-15

Friday:
Isaiah 48:17-19
Matthew 11:16-19

Saturday:
Ecclesiasticus 48:1-4, 9-11
Matthew 17:10-13

Next Sunday:
Zephaniah 3:14-18
Philippians 4:4-7
Luke 3:10-18