

Feast of the Holy Family – Year A

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Many years ago, a man would sit in one of the middle pews of his local parish church. However, as the time for mass would get closer and the mass-goers would come in, he would slip out the back, and would stand outside... peering into the now-crowded Church. After hearing the “Gloria’s, Alleluia’s and Holy, Holy, Holies, from the members of the congregation, he would return to his pew once mass concluded and the priest returned to his sacristy. A pious man to be sure, but why not participate? Why not enter into the mass with the congregation? In a word: Hope...

Hope, is why he stayed, hope is why he came, and hope is why we pray that this man is in heaven. But what is hope? Perhaps you have had this question when you heard last year that the Pope had declared that this year, 2025 as the Jubilee Year of Hope. When Pope Francis dedicated the year to hope, he chose one of my favorite poets as one of the exemplar’s Hope. Charles Pegúy is exactly the man who came into the pew, prayed, and would watch the mass from afar. And he has Pegúy has something important to teach, each and every one of us.

Pegúy had made some poor decisions in his early life and felt that he should not receive communion and because of this, he felt like he was not able to sit in the pews with the rest of his fellow Catholics. Yet, even though he had difficulties with the

institutional Church, he realized that there was something precious, holy, and sacred about the Church and the mysteries that we celebrate at mass today.

After recovering from Christmas festivities, perhaps you know someone who experienced family strife and difficulties with religion, politics, and the rest over Christmas hams and pies; or perhaps even more painfully, you felt the absence of a loved one who chose not to attend the family celebrations this year. However, Pegúy is an interesting figure who has something to teach all of us; Rather than becoming embittered by his own free choices in his past, Pegúy dove deep into the frustrations he had with God and the Church. He wrestled with God and from that encounter came to faith and would piously sit outside the Church to pray. Later in his life, Pegúy would be called up into French military service and as he continued to believe in Hope. Praying that his family would return to the Catholic Faith. While fighting for God and country, in France, the rest of the Pegúy family, wife and children, would return to the faith and be welcomed into the Church. And he, Charles, a faithful man who believed in hope, would die on the battlefield, encouraging his men to break the German defenses in World War I who exemplified the virtue of Hope with his dying breath.

This non-practicing Catholic has now become the central figure of this Jubilee year of Hope. When I saw the declaration from Pope Francis that this was to be a year of Hope, I immediately thought of my French Friend: Charles Pegúy and his major

work, *Portal of the Mystery of Hope*. In this work, he describes Hope *as a little girl*. The other theological virtues, Faith and Love are described by as mature women in the prime of their lives. He writes, that they are steady like a “loyal wife,” or, “a mother,” just as St. Paul describes a woman of virtue in our second reading. However, we find in Pegúy’s mind that *hope is more surprising. She’s like a child, a little girl who, as the three virtues are making their procession to Heaven, dashes back and forth. She runs up ahead of the other two, then back, then ahead again.*

Faith is described as the important virtue that “sees what is,” and love “loves what is” meanwhile, hope “*sees what will be.*” *Hope is always making a beginning, exploring potential, and moves the world forward.* Love and faith are made evident in the present, whereas hope? Hope looks to the future, in quiet expectation, running in between the other magnanimous virtues of Faith and Love.

Hope is not something we think of, or even pray for. In fact, Pegúy makes this point when he says that “hope is not obvious. Hope does not come on its own. To hope, my child, you would have to be quite fortunate, to have obtained, received a great grace.” There is a profound but subtle truth here, hope is not something that we can make up, we can never come to it on our own. Rather, we must pray for Hope, it is given to us directly by God which is what Pegúy means when he says “To hope... is to have received a great grace.”

All of us have experienced great challenges; a death in the family, the loss of a home, moving to a new city, or losing a job. All of us have wondered, “how can I move on from here?” And yet, even if we haven’t noticed it, we have been given the strength to move forward. Look at our Gospel today, Mary and Joseph are refugees, leaving their homeland because of a dictatorial terrorist, King Herod who is killing the newborn baby children to maintain his own Kingship. And yet? Jesus, Mary and Joseph, the Holy Family, the feast which we celebrate today are not unaware of the need for hope. If Pegúy is right, which the Late Holy Father seems to believe that he is, then living in a life of hope creates for us a new future. Hope “*sees what will be.*” *It is the virtue of hope which always makes a new beginning, exploring potential, and moves the world forward. The question for us then, is... do we dare to hope?*