

**November 30, 2007**

## **U.S. BISHOPS WELCOME ENCYCLICAL ON HOPE**

WASHINGTON—*Spe salvi* (Saved by hope), the second encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI, offers inspiration to all believers, said Cardinal Francis George of Chicago, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

“Pope Benedict calls us personally and as a community to a hope rooted in Jesus,” he said. Cardinal George made his remarks November 30, the day the encyclical was released at the Vatican.

*Spe Salvi* instructs readers that the Christian message is not only “informative” but also “performative,” that is, “the Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known – it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing,” Pope Benedict says. It is in receiving God through Jesus Christ that we receive hope. He illustrates this point narrating the life of the African slave, St. Josephine Bakhita.

The Pope outlines the concept of faith-based hope in the New Testament and early church and says that Christianity did not bring to the Roman world a hopeful message of social revolution. Jesus, who died on a cross, brought a totally different kind of hope. He made possible an encounter with “the Lord of all lords, an encounter with the living God and thus an encounter with a hope stronger than sufferings of slavery,” which therefore transformed life.

This hope exceeds the physical laws of nature and evolution. It is ultimately not these laws that govern the world and mankind and have the final say; a personal God governs the universe – “reason, will, love – a Person,” Pope Benedict says.

For the Pope, Christian hope is not individualistic. It is community oriented – all of us are becoming the people of God – the body of Christ, he says. Because our hope is a hope that incorporates all men and women, this hope spurs us not only to obtain eternal life, but to also manifest this hope of eternal life here on earth. We do this by striving to make our life on earth a heavenly life – a life of productivity, justice, peace, and goodness – a positive world order that prospers.

The Holy Father also notes the importance of Christian faith-hope in the modern age. In the encyclical letter, Pope Benedict analyzes the false utopian dreams of the modern age and points out the untold suffering they have caused human beings. From this point of view, redemption is no longer through faith in God’s saving action but from what human beings can achieve through the application of technical knowledge to all of society’s problems. A praxis-oriented science draws on an understanding of progress as the overcoming of all dependency to make room for a “kingdom” in which God is no longer at the center. Pope Benedict reflects that when reason renounces faith in revelation or the moral wisdom of the great religions, it has led to scientific developments which in some cases evoke fear among our contemporaries. Just as man needs God in order to sustain hope, reason needs faith to make the world a more human place. “Reason needs faith to be completely itself,” the pope says.

Pope Benedict also observes that prayer leads to hope. "A first essential setting for learning hope is prayer. . . . When I can no longer talk to anyone or call upon anyone, I can always talk to God," he says.

He adds that action and suffering are also settings for learning hope. "We can try to limit suffering, to fight against it, but we cannot eliminate it," he says. "It is not by sidestepping or fleeing from suffering that we are healed, but rather by our capacity for accepting it, maturing through it and finding meaning through union with Christ, who suffered with infinite love."

A person "cannot accept another's suffering unless he personally is able to find meaning in suffering, a path of purification and growth in maturity, a journey of hope. Indeed, to accept the 'other' who suffers, means that I take up his suffering in such a way that it becomes mine also. Because it has now become a shared suffering, though, in which another person is present, this suffering is penetrated by the light of love," he says also.

Pope Benedict highlights the practice of praying for the dead saying it reveals another important element of the Christian concept of hope. "As Christians we should never limit ourselves to asking: how can I save myself? We should also ask: what can I do in order that others may be saved and that for them too the star of hope may rise? Then I will have done my utmost for my own personal salvation as well," he says.

*Spe salvi* is the second encyclical of Pope Benedict. His first, "*Deus caritas est*," (God is love) explored the meaning of Christian love and how it is expressed in everyday life. He issued it December 25, 2005.