

Requiem (Hyllebrett) I ended last Monday's programme with a little quote from an address given by the late Pope John Paul in an audience the week before he died. Today, I'd like to share with you more of that talk of his about Christian hope — a timely and, perhaps, prophetic topic for us to reflect on and to pray about in these days while we still mourn his sudden departure from us, less than a week ago. Pope John Paul: "The second of the 7 'Camps of Sanctification' for Pope John was Hope. Today I will speak to you of this virtue, which is obligatory for every Christian. In his Paradise, Dante imagined himself taking an examination in Christianity. A magnificent examining board was sitting. 'Do you have faith?' St Peter asks him first. 'Do you have hope?' St James continues. 'Do you have charity?' St John asks. 'Yes' Dante answers, 'I have faith, I have hope, I have charity.' He proves it, and passes with full marks. I said that hope is obligatory: that does not mean that hope is easy or hard. On the contrary, anyone who lives it travels in an atmosphere of trust and abandonment, saying with the psalmist: 'Lord, you are my rock, my shield, my fortress, my refuge, my lamp, my shepherd, my salvation. Even if an army were to encamp against me, my heart will not fear; and if the battle rages against me, even then I am confident.' You will say: is not this psalmist exaggeratedly enthusiastic? Is it possible that things always went right for him? No, they did not always go right. He too knew, and says so, that the bad are often fortunate and the good oppressed. He even complained to the Lord about it sometimes. But his hope remained: firm, unshakable. To him and to all those who hope can be applied what St Paul said of Abraham: 'In hope he believed against hope'

You will say further: how can this happen? It happens because one is attached to 3 truths — God is almighty, God loves me immensely, God is faithful to promises. And it is he, the God of mercy, who kindles trust in me; so that I do not feel lonely, or useless, or abandoned, but involved in a destiny of salvation, which will lead to Paradise one day. I mentioned the Psalms. The same certain confidence vibrates in the books of the saints. I would like you to read a homily delivered by St Augustine on Easter Day about 'Alleluia'. We will sing the true Alleluia (he says approximately) in Paradise. That will be the Alleluia of full love: this one, now, is the Alleluia of starving love, that is, of hope. Some one will say: what if I am a poor sinner? I reply as I replied to an unknown penitent who confessed to me many years ago. She said she was discouraged because she'd had a stormy life recently. 'May I ask you' I said 'how old you are?' '35' she said. '35! But you can live for another 40 or 50 and do a great deal of good. So, instead of thinking of the past, project yourself into the future and renew your life, with God's help.' On that occasion I quoted St Francis of Sales, who speaks of "our dear imperfections". I explained: God detects failings because they are failings. On the other hand, however, in a certain sense he loves failings since they give to him an opportunity to remain humble and to understand and to sympathize with our neighbour's failings. — Pope John Paul. Let's think over that for a few moments now, as we listen to 'Agnus Dei' from the Requiem of Hyllebrett — 'Lord of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us, grant us rest and peace'

MUSIC (cette.o.16 25)

PRAYERS.

In his audience address two weeks ago, Pope John Paul went on to say: 'Not everyone shares this sympathy & mine for hope. Nietzsche, for example, calls it the virtue of the weak. According to him, it makes the Christian a useless, separated, resigned person, extraneous to the progress of the world. Often speak of 'alienation', what they say turns the Christian away from the struggle for human advancement. But the Christian message, said the Vatican Council, far from deterring men from the task of building up the world... binds them, rather, to add this by a still more stringent obligation. In the course of the centuries there have also appeared from time to time affirmations and tendencies of Christians that were too pessimistic with regard to mankind. But these affirmations were disapproved of by the Church and were forgotten, thanks to a host of joyful and hard-working saints, to Christian humanism, to the esoteric teachers... and to a comprehensive theology.... When St Thomas Aquinas declared, (for example) that joking and making people smile was a virtue, he was in agreement with the 'glad tidings' preached by Christ, and with the 'cheerfulness' recommended by St Augustine. He overcame pessimism, clothed Christian life in joy and invited us to keep up our courage also with the healthy, pure joys, which we need on our way.... Certainly, these simple joys, though good and encouraging, must not be absolutized. They are something, not everything: they serve as a means, they are not the supreme purpose: they do not last for ever, but only for a short time. 'Christian' St Paul wrote 'deal with the world as though they had no dealings with ~~it~~^{it} for the form of this world is passing away.' Christ had already said: Seek first of all the kingdom of God.