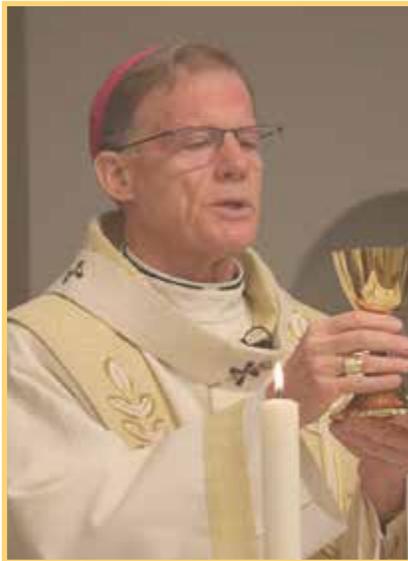


Abide in Christ

A Right Relationship with God



Archbishop John C. Wester

During these first days of 2019, it is not uncommon to hear people making their New Year's resolutions, giving witness to the truth of Alexander Pope's famous quote, "Hope springs eternal in the human breast..." Yet, like Charlie Brown who, year after year, hopes Lucy will not pull the football back as he tries to kick it, so also are so many of our resolutions, our hopes, dashed as the painful reality of life's failures seem to mock our dreams, our aspirations and our heartfelt hopes for a better future. This seems truer than ever this year as we contend with continued wars throughout the world, sharp political divisions in our country, stock market volatility, and the ravages of poverty, addiction and violent crime here in New Mexico. And as Catholics, it is even harder than ever to maintain hope as we deal with the tragedy of clergy sexual abuse, which has caused inexpressible suffering in those who have been victims, and also has thrust a deep wound in

our own hearts. No, hope does not seem to square with our reality right now. But as understandable as such pessimism is, it has no place in the heart of a Christian. Through our baptisms, we were made one with Christ in His suffering, death and resurrection. Therefore, despite all the reasons for dejection and despair, we are a people of hope. Hope is in our Catholic DNA and always will be. As Psalm 33 puts it, "We put our hope in the Lord. He is our help and our shield. In Him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in His holy name." (Ps. 33: 20-22) Our hope is based on a right relationship with God, a relationship that brings profound peace and inner wholeness – a relationship that has a future.

The Book of the Prophet Zephaniah gives us an insight into this reality. Zephaniah does not paint a rosy picture: he is read only once in the entire three-year cycle of the Sunday lectionary and perhaps for good reason since it is a difficult book of the Bible that speaks of judgment and calamity. However, in the middle of this "doom and gloom", there is an island of hope that speaks of joy because God is with us. The prophet reminds the people that God is in their midst. As St. Paul says in Romans 8:31, "If God is on our side, can anyone be against us?"

St. Paul grasped this reality in a profound way. The Lord Jesus Christ, in whom and through whom and for whom all things were made, loves us with a personal and limitless love. He is the Hound of Heaven, the Good Shepherd, who searches us out and whose love constantly renews us. Our relationship with Christ gives us a hope that cannot be extinguished. As we read in Paul's letter to the Romans, "Neither death nor life, nor angel nor prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power nor height nor depth nor any created

thing can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)

The core of this message is that only a right relationship with our God of love will give us true hope. When we place our hope in material things, states of being, public acclaim, power or financial success we soon realize that our hopes were destined to be dashed. There is a certain fleeting joy that comes with these realities but this joy is superficial and leaves us wanting, hoping, for more. Just look at the number of wealthy, powerful or popular people who are depressed and never satisfied with what they have as they keep searching for happiness somewhere else. St. Augustine was aware of this centuries ago when he reminded us that our hearts are restless until they rest in the Lord. St. Ignatius built on this truth when he wrote that we are created for one purpose only, namely, to be one with God forever in heaven. Only a relationship with God can fulfill all our hopes. As a wise man once said, "God knows all we want and He has all we need."

Moreover, to be in a loving relationship with Christ is to be affirmed at our deepest level, giving us a sense of self-worth and the sure knowledge that our lives have meaning. This in turn allows us to love ourselves in the proper sense of that term and to love others as ourselves. A right relationship with God opens up so many other relationships in our lives, all of which help to fulfill our hopes for the future. Only love can completely fulfill us since human beings were created for love by a God who is love. Created in His image, love is our only destiny and love is itself the only way to achieve that destiny. As Jesus told us, "I am the way, the truth and the life." In other words, Jesus is the truth that leads us along the path of life by loving us into being and being

our love.

As I have said, a relationship with God always has a future. Christ is always coming to us: He is the God of more. The Christmas Feast we just celebrated is symbolic of the infinite ways that Christ comes to us every moment of our existence. Christ loves us with an everlasting love, which is a critical aspect of our hope and of our joy. Joy that lasts only for the moment, even if the type of joy brought about by love, is not ultimately satisfying. Love must always grow. Like a river, the more it changes, the more it grows, the more it remains itself. If love were only for the present, it would doom us to a life of regret, looking at what once was and is no more. Christ's love is not like this. It is forever and therefore it is a source of unending joy, of unending possibilities, of hopes fulfilled. This is why the sacrament of marriage joins a husband and wife in a permanent bond, a bond meant to last an entire lifetime. Indeed, because Christ is an intimate part of that sacrament, their love can be seen as unending: Christ's love comes with an eternal seal. Christ has promised to be with us always until the end of time, at which point we will be one with Him forever in heaven. Now that is something to hope for!

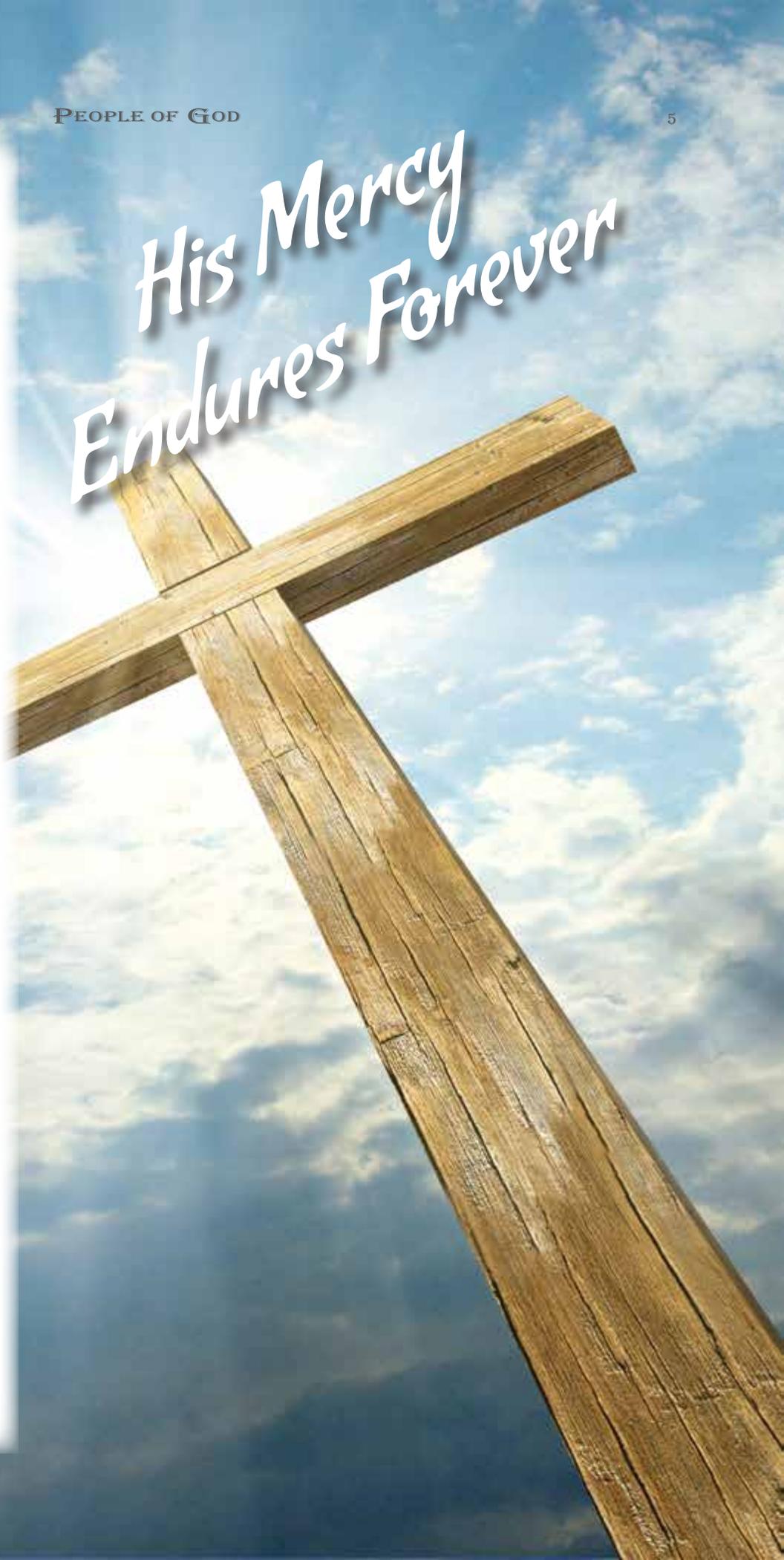
True hope, then, is not a matter of passing fancy or New Year's resolutions, but rather a mature love affair with God that takes root in this life in our love for others, and blossoms in eternity. Because we have a future with Christ, our most painful present will be transformed into a redeemed past. In other words, there is always hope in Christ, there is always new life in Christ, there is always a tomorrow with Christ. All the loves of our lives are subsumed into Christ's eternal love for us and our eternal love for Him. That is why in the end, death itself will die and we will be one with Christ and all the loves of our lives forever.

This is the perspective Christian hope gives to our grieving Church and especially to the victims of clergy sexual abuse. This moment is profoundly painful and will continue to be for the unforeseeable future. But even this tragedy cannot eradicate our hope for the future. God is with us and we rejoice, we have hope, even if through our tears.

Sincerely yours in the Lord

+ John C. Wester

Most Rev. John C. Wester,
Archbishop of Santa Fe



His Mercy
Endures Forever