

Elaine Ireland, Baltimore's Spiritual Development Associate, had the pleasure of talking with Fr. John Donahue, S.J.,* about the topic of hope and the challenges we face finding hope in these difficult times. Here's are some thoughts Fr. Donahue shared.

Elaine: Let's talk about hope--theological hope—and practical hope—the everyday experiences of hope that keep us going. You emphasize the importance of Jesus' parables and imagination to draw us forward into a vision of what the world can be. Can you elaborate on this for us?

Fr. John: First, let me say that my interest in imagination, stories, and hope are due largely to the influence of the late Jesuit, William Lynch, his writings on these topics, as well as his role in my life as a young scholastic at Georgetown. For Lynch, hopelessness is an illness of the imagination. Those who are without hope are locked into a single vision of the world and see no escape from their current situation. That's why Jesus' parables were so powerful for the people of his time who were stuck in what Lynch refers to as a "univocal" way of thinking—a mindset that does not engage the diversity of life experiences and the possibilities therein. Jesus' stories turned this way of thinking on its head: the Good Samaritan, the vineyard owner who pays the last first. The parables express a paradox that caused the people then, and I might add, us today, to think differently, since we still suffer some of the same univocal ways of thinking.

We talked about the hope Pope Francis has brought to the Church and the world as a whole. What are other stories and events you look to today as a source of hope? Where do you find hope?

Again, I'll call attention to a premise Lynch proposed in his book, *Images of Hope*. He says those who suffer from hopelessness need other's imaginations to work with his or her own so that a new future can be imagined; that they must put on another's imagination in order to rediscover their own. I hear the Pope encouraging all of us to share our imaginations and hopes with those who are low on hope, and also to remember that it is in standing with the poor and marginalized that we ourselves find hope. I see this at work through the youth of the world who are taking strong stands against the status quo of economic inequality and climate change that will impact their lives in significant ways. I also see it in the mission and the work of the Ignatian Volunteer Corps, mature men

and women who refuse to sit back or become jaded, and continue to work one-on-one in their communities to bring about a vision of hope.

We encourage Ignatian volunteers to reflect on their service experiences with the poor and disenfranchised in our city. What questions or advice might you give to them to guide their reflections? What are the Scripture passages you pray with when you feel challenged to hope?

If we find ourselves struggling with hope, let's bring it to prayer. We can incorporate it into our nightly examen: "Who did I notice planting seeds of hope, or waiting for the harvest of hope today?" "Who are the surprising others I encountered who revealed the mercy and love of God to me or to others?"

St. Ignatius is a big proponent of the use of the imagination. He encourages us to enter gospel scenes and participate. I mentioned the parable of the Good Samaritan as a great story with which to pray when we are low on hope. You can enter the scene as one of the characters—the victim, the priest or Levite, the Samaritan, the innkeeper--or be an observer watching the story unfold.

This can also help us use our imaginations to write parables for today. When faced with a situation, what do I desire? What do I hope for? What are the things that I can affect to bring about what I wish for this person, this situation?

We hear in Hebrews 6:19 that we are to have hope as "a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls." The psalms, specifically 3, 62, and 71 are good prayers to remind us that our hope is in God's covenant. Many of Paul's letters, particularly his Letter to the Romans, also provide wisdom and encouragement for holding onto hope.

Are there any final thoughts you'd like to share?

In the triad of faith, hope, and love, hope is often neglected, but today, as we face a virtual tsunami of threats, it is imperative that we turn to God as our source of hope, a God who throughout our faith history keeps his promise of salvation alive. God's voice, through the words of Scripture and through the works of countless people working for justice, is the strong anchor we hold onto in the midst of rising tides of injustice and despair. Let's use our imaginations, grounded in faith and hope, to bring about a new vision of the future.

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