

# Christian Life between Memory and Hope

*Thomas Padiyath*  
Archeparchy of Changanacherry

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"The Believer is essentially 'one who remembers'" -Pope Francis

**T**he Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* is Magna Carta of the pastoral vision of Pope Francis for the renewal of the Church. It does say something to all of us; to the hierarchy, to the priests and the consecrated men & women, to the theologians, to the lay faithful and to the youth and the children. It is a document rich in content and filled with pastoral thrust. Here heart speaks to the heart. That is the beauty of this exhortation. Who is a Christian believer? People have answered this question differently. Anyone could answer that a Christian is one who is baptized with the trinitarian formula. For Oscar Romero (1917-1980), former Archbishop of San Salvador, El Salvador and a martyr for justice and peace, 'a Christian is one who incarnates Christ in Life'. What is the answer given by Pope Francis? For him, "a believer is essentially one who remembers" (*Evangelii Gaudium* 13). What does Pope want to say? I would say it is the whole truth about Christian Life!

## Faith is Remembrance

Faith is the remembrance (memory) of the salvific act of God accomplished through the history of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The central point of

this salvific history and memory is the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. Pope Francis writes: “The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sor-

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row, inner emptiness and loneliness” (EG 1). Faith is the remembrance of this transforming experience with Jesus. “Memory is a dimension of our faith which

we might call “deuteronomic”, not unlike the memory of Israel itself. Jesus leaves us the Eucharist as the Church’s daily remembrance of, and deeper sharing in, the event of his Passover (cf. Lk 22:19). The joy of evangelizing always arises from grateful remembrance: it is a grace which we constantly need to implore” (EG 13).

It is also worth noting that Evangelist John relates both Faith and Memory in explaining the role of the Holy Spirit. “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (Jn 14, 26). It is the Church that keeps alive this memory which is faith. Church’s life itself is in this memory. Therefore, one can rightly say that she is at the same time the agent as well as the “remembering subject” (LF 38) of this memory. That is why it is observed that the “Church is a mother who teaches us to speak the language of Faith” (LF 38). It is equally true to say that faith is essentially ecclesial. It is in the faith of the Church that one participates through Baptism. So the profession of faith is two dimensional: personal as well as ecclesial. Church is the primary subject of Faith. Therefore, Pope emeritus Benedict XVI exhorts:

Confessing with the lips indicates in turn that faith implies public testimony and commitment. A Christian may never think of belief as a private act. Faith is choosing to stand with the Lord so as to live with him. ... The Church on the day of Pentecost demonstrates with utter clarity this public dimension of believing and proclaiming one's faith fearlessly to every person (PF 10).

Faith is a public act and liturgy is the public celebration of this faith. Therefore, each Christian should celebrate and live this memory with the Church and by participating in the life of the Church.

## **Believer = One Who Remembers**

If faith is essentially a remembrance of the experience of encountering Jesus it logically follows that a believer is essentially one who remembers. A Christian is one who lives in the memory of the encounter with Jesus and the memory of the paschal mystery disclosed in Christ Jesus. Moreover, a Christian is one who lives in this remembrance and one who celebrates this remembrance. This is what Pope Francis means when he writes that "The Believer is essentially 'one who remembers.'" The content of this memory is the encounter with Jesus. That is why Pope Benedict XVI writes that "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (Deus Caritas Est 1). In the words of evangelist John this encounter/event is characterised by the experience of God's love. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes

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in him should ... have eternal life" (3:16). This encounter is salvific (EG 1). It is the memory of this encounter and the memory of the salvific mystery and history that guides a Christian leading one to have renewed hope in the Lord.

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From another perspective one is able to understand the theology disclosed in the statement of Pope Francis that a Christian is essentially one who remembers. The liturgy

which is the commemoration and public proclamation of faith is celebrated in and through signs and symbols and through different liturgical seasons. Thus liturgical season is the saving memory of the paschal mystery. Therefore, celebration of the different liturgical seasons enables one to live in the memory of paschal mystery (SC 102). Liturgy is the source and summit of Christian life (SC 10). The Eucharist which is the heart of the liturgical celebration of the Church and also the source of all Christian spirituality is also a memorial celebration. Thus, one can conclude that a Christian is essentially one who remembers the mystery of faith with the Church (SC 99) because Church is the 'Subject' of this celebration. She keeps this memory alive in her life and empowers others to keep this memory alive in their personal life (LF 38). In this light one has to say it again that faith as well as its memory are essentially ecclesial.

## **Life between Faith and Hope**

In continuation of what we have discussed above one can reasonably say that a Christian is essentially who believes, hopes and loves (Acts 2, 42; 1 Thes.5, 8). The

memory as well as its celebration leads to hope. Faith and Hope are inseparable. Therefore, it is not wrong to say that hope is the first fruit of believing. The reason is:

Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy. It makes us fruitful, because it expands our hearts in hope and enables us to bear life-giving witness: indeed, it opens the hearts and minds of those who listen to respond to the Lord's invitation to adhere to his word and become his disciples (PF 7).

For Pope Benedict XVI "Faith is the substance of hope" (SS 10) because "[t]o come to know God—the true God—means to receive hope" (SS 3) and that "in faith [we have] the key to "eternal life"" (SS 10; Eph 3, 12; EG 161). Therefore, what is advisable is that Christians have to rediscover the hope because "[t]he dark door of time, of the future, has been thrown open" (SS 2). Today, even Christians fail to live with hope and many like others want to build their

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'eternal tent' here on earth. Holy Father puts this in the following way: "We who have always lived with the Christian concept of God, and have grown accustomed to it, have almost ceased to notice that we possess the hope that ensues from a real encounter with this God" (SS 3). Therefore, the imperative is given to us that we need to rediscover hope for "[t]he one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life" (SS 2). A life without hope is not worthy of its name Christian. Because of the indissolubility of faith and hope one is right in saying that we are saved by hope. That is the reason why Pope Benedict XVI with St Paul could say that we are saved in

hope. Thus, it can be conclusively stated that a Christian lives in the memory of the redemptive mystery which gives saving hope.

## References:

1. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, 2013.
  2. Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, Encyclical Letter, 2013.
  3. Pope Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, Apostolic Letter for the Indiction of the Year of Faith, 2011.
  4. Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, Encyclical Letter, 2005.
  5. Pope Benedict XVI, *SPE SALVI* Encyclical Letter, 2007.
  6. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Second Vatican Council Constitution on Liturgy.
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“It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.” — Aristotle “

Any fool can know. The point is to understand.” — Albert Einstein

“Turn your wounds into wisdom.” — Oprah Winfrey

“Let no man pull you so low as to hate him.” — Martin Luther King Jr.

“It is amazing how complete is the delusion that beauty is goodness.” — Leo Tolstoy