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“That is why I constantly urge young people not to let themselves be robbed of hope; to each of them I repeat: Let no one despise your youth” Christus Vivit 15

Do not let myself be robbed of hope? How dare I let myself be robbed of hope! How dare I let myself be robbed of hope when there are people braver than I, people like Malala Yousafzai who woke up every day and looked fear in the eye. People like Malala who were so certain of what they knew and what they knew was that “One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world.” To let myself be robbed of hope would be an insult to people like Malala who have seen and felt what I only fear, to let myself be robbed of hope would be an insult to Malala herself, who by the Taliban’s hand was shot and bled for hope. People like Malala don’t only have hope but they are hope, they are Saint Augustine’s daughters “Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are, and Courage to see that they do not remain as they are” and yes these people are braver than I, but I watch them and I am braver for it.

I cannot allow myself to be robbed of hope when there are women stronger than I, women like Greta Thunberg who was not robbed of hope when she sat quietly on the cobblestones outside parliament in Stockholm every day for two weeks. Women like Greta who were not robbed of hope when after fighting for her place on a world stage was described as “a somewhat distressed kid having a textbook teenage strop.” Women like Greta who were strong enough to when stood in front of the UN announce her truth “My message is that we’ll be watching you. This is all wrong. I shouldn’t be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean. Yet you all come to us young people for hope. How dare you. You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words.” I cannot allow myself to be robbed of hope because I have seen women like Greta who absolutely embody Jeremiah 29:11 “I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope”, and yes these people are braver and these women are stronger than I but I watch them and I am braver and stronger for it.

I do not want myself to be robbed of hope when there are children more inspiring than I, children like Sophie Cruz who at six years old who was not robbed of hope even when her immigrant parents were faced with deportation. Children like Sophie who instead of being robbed of hope, wrote to Pope Francis imploring for help, children like Sophie who instead of turning to anger said “Let us fight with love, faith, and courage so that our families will not be destroyed.” I do not want myself to be robbed of hope because of children like Sophie who were not robbed of hope even when her president actively took steps to build a wall separating neighbours “I will build a great, great wall on our southern border, and I will make Mexico pay for that wall”, children like Sophie who were not robbed of hope because she had been taught Jesus’ golden rule that as children of God our ultimate duty is to “love your neighbour” and she had read of St Paul’s letter to the Romans “love does no harm to a neighbour, therefore love is a fulfilment of the law” and yes these people are braver than I, these women are stronger than I and these children are more inspiring than I, but I watch them and I am braver, stronger and more inspired for it.

But even still I feel myself losing hope... I am losing hope because for every brave, strong and inspiring young person out there, another is left deflated because the reality is that as young people many of us do come to despise our own youth. We are left this way not by conscious will, but how can we be hopeful when we are overlooked and told we are too young to have an opinion about our own lives. I have personally felt I have been given more hope from Harry Potter “Happiness can be found in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light” than I have from my own government. I have lost hope because every day I witness what it seemingly means to “be a grown up” and what that means is “Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.” (Galatians 6:8)

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But I have seen this in practise and it does not provide the hope it should, because as a young person when I see cases of my own elected government intending to deny 1.3 million schoolchildren free school meals I feel myself losing even more hope. I lose even more hope because I may be young but I know that decisions like these were not sowed to please the spirit, so it can only have been to please their own flesh... so yes, suddenly I am left with less hope.

But I believe it is impossible for hope to be truly lost, because hope is like energy, and the very law of Conservation of Energy states that energy cannot be created or destroyed - it can only be transferred from one type to another. In this same way no one person and no thing can truly take away your hope instead "those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."(Isaiah 40:31) So when our hope appears to have died out, it is not gone it has just changed. As a student if I don't do perform well in a test my options are accept failure, or, change my perspective. I then look towards the next test; I look for the future... because hope allows you to keep going down different roads, to see things different, and to try and make things for your perfect ideal. This holds true, even when there seems like there isn't a solution. In fact, the word "hope" is in the definition of the word "faith"- Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Furthermore, Faith without works is dead. Meaning, if you simply wish on something to happen, but do nothing to work toward it, then it is of no use. In order for us to fulfil our Ideal of Hope, we have to take action with our hope. These actions do not have to be big or change the world, they do not have to be fighting the Taliban or speaking to the UN or igniting immigration reforms... every small word or smile or breath taken with "hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us"(Romans 5:5)

"That is why I constantly urge young people not to let themselves be robbed of hope; to each of them I repeat: Let no one despise your youth", Pope Francis said this in 2018 at the Fifteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Christus vivit ('Christ is Alive') in an address to young people and to the entire people of God. However, he also said this "The media only writes about the sinners and the scandals, but that's normal, because a tree that falls makes more noise than a forest that grows". This is the message I hear, that everywhere we look we could find another reason to give up hope and it is the ability to focus not on what is broken in the world but what possibility exists to fix it that truly makes us brave and strong and inspiring. And as Christians it is easier for us. It is easier for because we have not only hope, we have faith. As Christians we have guidance and we have teaching, as St Francis of Assisi exemplifies "Where there is discord may we bring harmony. Where there is error, may we bring truth. Where there is doubt, may we bring faith. Where there is despair, may we bring hope." As Christians we have the insight and the knowledge and the capacity for endless hope. St Columbanus said it himself "O Lord, grant us that love which can never die, which will enkindle our lamps but not extinguish them, so that they may shine in us and bring light to others." Therefore it is our duty to help young people, to shine and bring that light so we may help anyone who does not share our faith and so cannot feel our hope, to help them see that being young is not a disadvantage, it only means that we have more time on this earth to get braver, build strength and become inspired.