

## 2. One must save the seed

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines the virtue of hope thus:

“Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful" (Heb 10:23). “The Holy Spirit . . . he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:6–7).” (CCC n. 1817)

I think that many people feel the need to rediscover hope because the situation of the world, of the Church, of our communities asks us for something like a return to the essential, to what truly can save us, can truly save life and what is most precious for life.

There's a dialogue between Giovanni Guareschi's Don Camillo and the crucified Christ that I never tire of thinking of and that I gladly cite. You know that Don Camillo is a personality full of passion, always fighting to defend the Church and souls from the traps of ideology. In the stories he is the protagonist of, set in post-war Italy and Emilia-Romagna, he is always arguing with the communist mayor of his parish, Peppone, who, however, does share with the priest, if not ideas, at least a healthy humanity that ends up finding them in agreement as they seek the good of the people and especially of the poorest. Don Camillo has a very familiar relationship with the crucified Jesus of the altar of his church, to whom he often goes to speak about his problems. Jesus comforts him, but often also corrects and reproves him when his impulsive character makes him go over the embankments of the tranquil and conciliating behavior that a priest should have.

In one of the last stories of Don Camillo, Guareschi describes him as confronted by modern times, by the cultural, social, and moral disorder and confusion into which society is sinking itself, especially the young. This was written at the end of the 60s. Imagine what he would have to write today!

One day, indeed, Don Camillo vents with Jesus about the decadence of the times. A dialogue starts up that can illuminate us about how we too should and could face today's problems, including the problems of the Church and of the monastic life:

«“Lord, what is this storm of insanity? Is it not that the circle is closing in on itself and the world is running toward its rapid self-destruction?”

“Don Camillo, why such pessimism? So was my sacrifice useless? Has my mission among men failed, then, because the wickedness of men is stronger than the goodness of God?”

“No, Lord. I just meant to say that today people believe only in what they see and touch. But there are essential things that are not seen or touched: love, goodness, piety, honesty, modesty, hope. And faith. Things one cannot live without. This is the self-destruction I was talking about. Man, it seems to me, is destroying all his spiritual patrimony. The only true wealth he had accumulated in thousands of centuries. One

day not far off he will find himself like a caveman. The caves will be high skyscrapers full of marvelous machines, but man's spirit will be that of the caveman [...] Lord, if this is what will happen, what can we do?"

Christ smiles: "What the farmer does when the river overflows its embankments and floods the fields: one must save the seed. When the river will have gone back into its channel, the earth will reemerge and the sun will dry it out. If the farmer has saved the seed, he will be able to throw it on the ground that is even more fertile from the river mud, and the seed will bear fruit, and the stiff and golden heads of grain will give men bread, life, and hope. One must save the seed: faith. Don Camillo, you must help whoever still has faith and keep it intact. The spiritual desert spreads further every day, every day new souls dry up because they are abandoned by faith. Every day, more and more, men of many words and of no faith destroy the spiritual patrimony and the faith of others."» (Giovannino Guareschi, *Don Camillo e don Chichì*, in *Tutto Don Camillo*. Mondo piccolo, II, BUR, Milano, 2008, pp. 3114-3115; our translation)

Behold, hope means precisely this: to save the essential, to save what permits life and the sense of life to return and live, to rise up after each death and destruction, after everything seems to sink away because the threatening and turbid waters are rising with violence above our peaceful, daily life, in which everything seemed to be going forward with no problems, in which we thought that living out the faith would be simple, without contradictions.

But if one lives out hope, one is granted the experience that seemed impossible: that those waters that covered everything, that maybe wiped everything out, actually helped us do what God truly wanted of us: to live from faith, to live attached to the essential, to what truly promises fruitfulness of life. Life is fruitful not when we have our granaries full of grain to consume, but when it preserves and transmits the seeds to be sown, the seeds that even after us will transmit life, faith, love for Christ and humanity.