

# CHRIST OUR HOPE

**A Parish Study Guide To  
Pope Benedict XVI's Encyclical Letter**

***On Christian Hope (Spe salvi)***

**A Catechetical Resource of the  
Archdiocese of Washington  
In Preparation for the Apostolic Visit of**

**Pope Benedict XVI**

**to Washington, DC  
April 15 – 17, 2008**

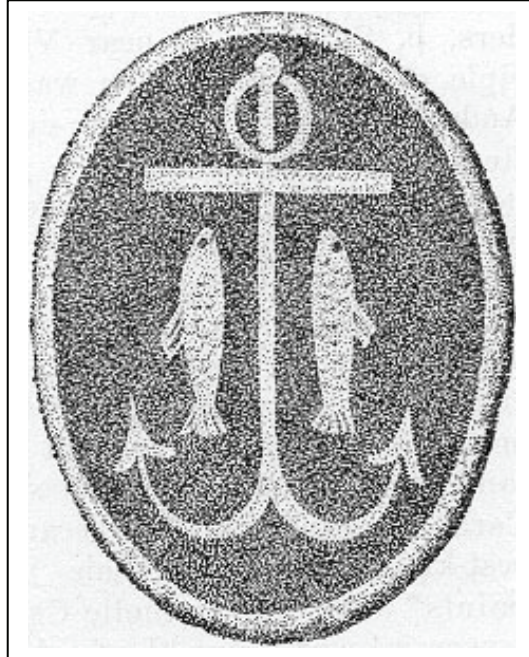


“It is in fact the task of every Bishop to proclaim hope to the world, hope based on the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ: a hope "which not only concerns penultimate matters but also and above all that eschatological hope which awaits the riches of the glory of God (cf. *Eph* 1:18), which surpasses anything that the human heart has ever conceived (cf. *1 Cor* 2:9), and to which the sufferings of the present cannot be compared (cf. *Rom* 8:18)".

A stance of theological hope, together with faith and love, must completely shape the Bishop's pastoral ministry.

The Bishop is called in a particular way to be a prophet, witness and servant of hope. He has the duty of instilling confidence and proclaiming before all people the basis of Christian hope (cf. *1 Pet* 3:15). The Bishop is the prophet, witness and servant of this hope, especially where a culture of "the here and now" leaves no room for openness to transcendence. Where hope is absent, faith itself is called into question. Love too is weakened by the loss of this virtue. Especially in times of growing unbelief and indifference, hope is a stalwart support for faith and an effective incentive for love. It draws its strength from the certainty of God's desire for the salvation of all people (cf. *1 Tim* 2:4) and from the constant presence of the Lord Jesus, the *Emmanuel* who remains with us always, until the end of the world (cf. *Mt* 28:20).”

*Pastores Gregis, On the Bishop,  
Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the Hope of the World,  
Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, October 2003*



**The anchor was one of the most popular  
early Christian symbols of hope.  
The anchor is found in early Christian catacombs  
and on seals and rings.  
This symbol of hope is based on the  
teaching of Scripture concerning:  
“the hope set before us...  
a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.”  
(Hebrews 6: 18-19)**

## INTRODUCTION

Pope Benedict XVI's upcoming apostolic journey to the United States will soon capture the attention of millions of people in this country and around the world. How will we, the faithful of the Archdiocese of Washington, prepare ourselves spiritually for this moment of grace when the successor of Saint Peter comes among us? How can we prepare our hearts and minds to better hear and fully live the message of hope the Holy Father brings?

*Christ Our Hope* is a Parish Study Guide offered to the faithful of the Archdiocese of Washington to assist in our spiritual preparations - as individuals, as a family, as a parish community, and as a diocese - for the upcoming papal visit.

This Study Guide is based on Pope Benedict XVI's most recent encyclical letter *On Christian Hope (Spe salvi)* and builds on the theme of the April 15-20, 2008 papal visit to America, which is, *Christ Our Hope*.

The Study Guide is ideal for use by pastors, families, couples, young adults, bible study, adult faith sharing, RCIA, and other parish groups. There are **SEVEN** sessions with outlines for each session containing the following components:

- ❖ Opening Prayer and Scripture Readings
- ❖ Catechesis of Themes and Quotes from *Spe salvi*
- ❖ Space for personal reflection notes
- ❖ Group Discussion Questions and Additional Suggested Readings

The papal encyclical *Spe salvi* is hereafter referred to as **SS**

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as **CCC**

The *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* as **USCCA**

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## HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

### Answers to a few basic questions

#### **Why should I avail of this Study Guide, *Christ Our Hope*?**

The Apostolic Visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Washington DC will be an extraordinary occasion of grace for this Archdiocese. As the successor of Saint Peter, the Pope embodies the unity of the Catholic faith. So we come together united in prayer and in faith because we believe the Pope leads, teaches, and sanctifies the universal Church in a unique way.

“I would like to read the Pope’s latest encyclical on Christian hope, but I just don’t have the time!” “I’m not sure if I would understand the themes of *Spe salvi* if I tried to read it on my own.”

This Study Guide invites the faithful of this Archdiocese to reflect on the message of Christian hope that is the theme of the papal visit and the subject of the latest papal encyclical. By taking time to reflect on what it means to live by Christian hope, personally and as a community of faith, we come to know a profound unity of faith, hope and love. We also prepare to become, in turn, living witnesses to hope in our families, neighborhoods and in society.

#### **What will I need to begin using this Study Guide?**

Along with this Study Guide you will need a Bible and Pope Benedict’s XVI’s Encyclical Letter *Spe salvi* ([www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)). You will also find in this resource quotes from the papal encyclical and references to the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults. This Study Guide is written in such a way that you can move easily between these various Church documents.

#### **How many sessions will it take to complete this Study Guide?**

There are **seven** sessions in this resource. It is recommended that the scheduling of sessions are planned in such a way that they lead up to Pope Benedict’s April 15–18 visit to Washington, DC.

#### **Session One – What is Christian Hope?**

#### **Session Two – Hope Changes Everything**

#### **Session Three – Biblical Witness to Hope**

#### **Session Four – The Sacraments and Christian hope**

#### **Session Five – The Social Nature of Hope**

#### **Session Six – Prayer, Action, Suffering – Schools of Hope**

#### **Session Seven – Becoming Ministers of Hope to Others**

## What happens at each Study Session?

Before **Session One** members of the group are encouraged to read the **Introduction** and **How To Use This Study Guide** sections of this resource. The **FOCUS OF THIS SESSION** textbox on the cover page of each outline gives an overview of the main themes of that study session. Then the pastor or group leader uses the following outline to guide each session:

**BEGIN** each session with prayer (use recommended prayers or choose others) (5 minutes)

**Invite** one person to read the suggested Scripture passage given at the beginning of each session.

**Allow** for a few minutes of quiet recollection and reflection on the words of Scripture. This draws participants away from the distractions and burdens of the day and opens their hearts and minds to receiving God's word. (10 minutes)

### **CATECHESIS:**

Begin the catechetical moment with an introduction based on the **Summary of Themes** from *Spe salvi*. (15 minutes)

**Invite** participants to **read** aloud **one or more** of the relevant passage(s) from *Spe salvi* excerpted for that theme (5 minutes)

**Invite** members of the group to share their personal insights and reflections on the **Summary of Themes** and the passage from *Spe salvi*. (20 minutes). Space for personal notes is provided in each session.

Participants share their reflections on the readings from *Spe salvi*. **Break** if time permits (5 minutes)

### **DISCUSSION:**

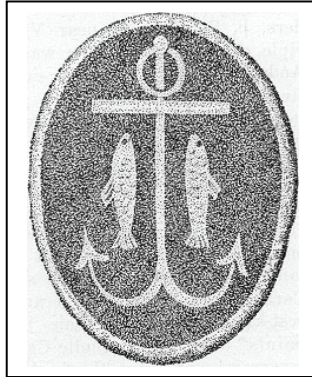
**Break into small groups to discuss** suggested **Discussion Questions** based on the themes of *Spe salvi*. (15 minutes)

Discussion, whether in large or small groups, is an effective element of adult faith formation and serves to bridge faith and life, and the message of Christian hope and contemporary culture. Leaders ensure that all members of the group have an opportunity to share their reflections, insights, and questions.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Briefly **Summarize** some of the main points that surface during the group discussion for that session. **Remind** participants of suggested readings in preparation for the following study session of *Spe salvi*.

**Conclude** the study session with the suggested **prayer, hymn, or scripture reading** found at the end of each session. (10 minutes)



## **SESSION ONE – WHAT IS CHRISTIAN HOPE?**

### **FOCUS OF THIS SESSION**

This Introductory study session focuses on the purpose of this faith enrichment resource on the papal encyclical *Spe salvi* in preparation for the upcoming visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Washington, DC. Leaders invite participants to reflect and share on what it means to live by Christian hope in the context of a society that offers multiple paths to human happiness. To be human is to have hopes for the present and the future. How does Christian hope direct and fulfill these human hopes in God the Father through Christ His Son in light of the Holy Spirit?

## SESSION ONE – WHAT IS CHRISTIAN HOPE?

### **OPENING PRAYER: Prayer to the Holy Spirit**

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful.  
And enkindle in us the fire of your love.  
Send forth your Spirit, and we shall be created.  
And you will renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, instructs the hearts of the faithful.  
Grant that by that same Spirit, we may be truly wise, and ever rejoice in His consolations.  
We make our prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **SCRIPTURE READING:**

*Invite one person to read aloud the following Scripture passage:*

“For in hope we were saved. Now hope that sees for itself is not hope.  
For who hopes for what one sees?  
But if we hope for what we do not see,  
we wait with endurance.”

(Romans 8: 24 – 25)

*Allow for a few minutes of quiet recollection and reflection on the words of Scripture. This draws participants away from the distractions and burdens of the day and opens hearts and minds to God’s word (5-10 minutes)*

## CATECHESIS:

***Pastor or group leader*** offers a brief introduction based on the following ***Summary of Themes from Spe salvi*** (15 minutes)

To be human is to desire a life of happiness. Our desire for happiness is one of the most basic facts of human existence. We are a “generation of seekers,” in the words of the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults.

Walk into a favorite bookstore and you will notice countless shelves of books offering popular advice on how to live a happy life. Guidance on how to achieve happiness effortlessly and instantly is a million dollar industry today.

Typically happiness is equated with fame and celebrity, financial prosperity, professional success, physical appearance, material prosperity – cars, homes, dream vacations – all of which are offered as measures of human happiness.

**“In hope we were saved” (Romans 8:24).** These words of Saint Paul begin the papal encyclical, *Spe salvi*, that we are about to study in preparation for the papal visit to America. They focus our attention on the meaning and importance of Christian hope. And they remind us that for a Christian true human happiness is ultimately to be found in our relationship with God, the foundation of our hope, “the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in its entirety.” (SS, 31)

So as we begin our reflections on “*Christ our Hope*,” we focus attention on this question – what does it mean to live by Christian hope today? How does this Christian virtue strengthen the spiritual life and deepen our daily walk with the Lord?

### **The virtue of hope**

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that hope is one of three theological virtues along with faith and charity. “Hope,” notes the Catechism, “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” (CCC 1817). Hope is the confidence that God abides with us on the journey of life into eternity.

To hope is to place our trust in the Father and in the promises of Christ His Son. The virtue of hope responds to the deepest human desire for happiness that is placed in our hearts by God. Hope takes up the human desire for happiness and purifies and orders that desire toward God.

Without God we remain without hope. As Pope Benedict notes, “man needs God, otherwise he remains without hope.” (*Spe salvi*, 23). Saint Paul summarizes the state of the human condition when he reminds the Ephesians that before they encountered Christ they were “without hope and without God in the world” (Ephs 2:12). Put simply, a world without God is a world without hope.

As followers of Christ we not only know about hope. We have been given the gift of hope. We are baptized into eternal life with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This eternal life with God is our hope. At the Eucharist we are nourished at the table of God's word and sacrament. Each one of us receives the gift of salvation in the hope of eternal life. "Redemption has been offered to us in the sense that we have been given hope, trustworthy hope." (SS, 1)

### **What do you hope for?**

All of us have hopes – greater and lesser hopes – by which we live each day. We have hopes for our families, our children, our friends and loved ones, our community, society and world. And even as our human hopes are fulfilled there is the realization of the need for a greater hope, for the infinite, something that will always be more than we can attain by our own human efforts. The virtue of Christian hope directs our minds and hearts to God.

"To come to know God—the true God—means to receive Christian hope" (SS, 3).

### **Now *invite* participants to read aloud one or more of the following passage(s) from *Spe salvi* (5 -10 mins)**

"What do we really want in life? What, in fact, is "life"? Ultimately we want only one thing—"the blessed life," the life which is simply life, simply "happiness." In the final analysis, there is nothing else that we ask for in prayer. Our journey has no other goal—it is about this alone. But then Saint Augustine also says: looking more closely, we have no idea what we ultimately desire, what we would really like... In some way we want life itself, true life, untouched even by death; yet at the same time we do not know the thing towards which we feel driven. We cannot stop reaching out for it, and yet we know that all we can experience or accomplish is not what we yearn for. This unknown "thing" is the true "hope" which drives us, and at the same time the fact that it is unknown is the cause of all forms of despair and also of all efforts, whether positive or destructive, directed towards worldly authenticity and human authenticity." (*Spe salvi*, 11-12)

"Day by day, man experiences many greater or lesser hopes, different in kind according to the different periods of his life. Sometimes one of these hopes may appear to be totally satisfying without any need for other hopes. Young people can have the hope of a great and fully satisfying love; the hope of a certain position in their profession, or of some success that will prove decisive for the rest of their lives. When these hopes are fulfilled, however, it becomes clear that they were not, in reality, the whole. It becomes evident that man has need of a hope that goes further. It becomes clear that only something infinite will suffice for him, something that will always be more than he can ever attain." (*Spe salvi*, 30)

"Let us say once again: we need the greater and lesser hopes that keep us going day by day. But these are not enough without the great hope, which must surpass everything else. This great hope can only be God, who encompasses the whole of reality and who can bestow upon us what we, by ourselves, cannot attain. The fact that it comes to us as a gift is actually part of hope. God is the foundation of hope: not any god, but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in its entirety." (*Spe salvi*, 31)

“It is not science that redeems man: man is redeemed by love... The human being needs unconditional love... If this absolute love exists, with its absolute certainty, then—only then—is man “redeemed”, whatever should happen to him in his particular circumstances. This is what it means to say: Jesus Christ has “redeemed” us. Through him we have become certain of God, a God who is not a remote “first cause” of the world, because his only-begotten Son has become man and of him everyone can say: “I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (*Gal 2:20*). (*Spe salvi*, 26)

“To come to know God—the true God—means to receive hope. 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.” (*Spe salvi*, 3)

“Life is not a simple product of laws and the randomness of matter, but within everything and at the same time above everything, there is a personal will, there is a Spirit who in Jesus has revealed himself as Love.” (*Spe salvi*, 5)

“Faith gives life a new basis, a new foundation on which we can stand” (*Spe salvi*, 8)

“Man needs God, otherwise he remains without hope” (*Spe salvi*, 23)

## REFLECTION NOTES:

Note your personal insights, questions, comments on these passages from *Spe salvi*

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**Invite** members of the group to share their personal insights and reflections on the **Summary of Themes** and the passage from *Spe salvi*. (20 minutes).

Group leader ensures that each person in the group has the opportunity to share, even briefly

**Break** if time permits (5 minutes)

### ***DISCUSSION:***

**Reflect on** the following **Discussion Questions** found in this Study Guide based on the themes of *Spe salvi*. (15 minutes)

1. Name some of the hopes and desires – greater and lesser - of your life. How do you measure human happiness?
2. Share how you strive to live by Christian hope. In what way is hope essential to Christian living today?
3. Each day society presents us with multiple paths to human happiness – celebrity fame, pleasure, material goods, professional success, to name only a few. What does faith in Jesus Christ offer? Why can we say with confidence that “Christ is our hope?”

**Discussion**, whether in large or small groups, is an effective element of adult faith formation and serves to bridge faith and life, and connect the message of Christian hope to ordinary, daily experiences and to contemporary culture.

### ***CONCLUSION:***

Pastor or group leader briefly **summarizes** the main points that emerged from the group discussion for this session. (10 mins)

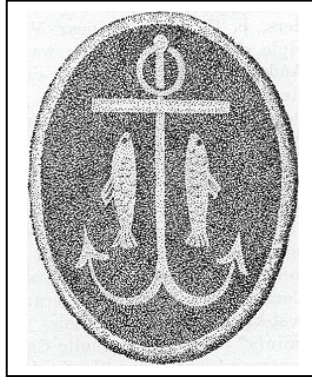
**Remind** participants of excerpts from *Spe salvi* in the next chapter as suggested readings in preparation for **Session Two**.

**Conclude** the study session with a **prayer, hymn, or scripture reading**:

**Prayer** – Our Father

**Hymn** – O God Our Help in Ages Past

**Scripture reading** - Romans 8: 24 – 25



## SESSION TWO

# HOPE CHANGES EVERYTHING

### FOCUS OF THIS SESSION

In Session Two participants reflect on the connection and relevance of faith to daily life in the world. This study session explores the meaning of Pope Benedict's insight that the Gospel is "*performative*," that is, it invites ongoing conversion in Christ and is ultimately life changing. Early Christian images of Jesus the Good Shepherd and Christ the philosopher as well as the lives of recently canonized saints will shape the group discussion on how the Gospel message brings hope as it changes our daily lives.



Fresco of Christ the Good Shepherd  
Ceiling of the Catacomb of Callixtus, Rome  
(c. 250 A.D.)

## SESSION TWO – HOPE CHANGES EVERYTHING

### **OPENING PRAYER: Prayer to the Holy Spirit**

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful. And enkindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, and we shall be created. And you will renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, instructs the hearts of the faithful. Grant that by that same Spirit, we may be truly wise, and ever rejoice in His consolations. We make our prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **SCRIPTURE READING:**

*Invite one person to read aloud the following Scripture passage:*

The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I lack.  
In green pastures you let me graze;  
To safe waters you lead me; to restore my strength,  
You guide me along the right path for the sake of your name.  
Even when I walk through a dark valley,  
I fear no harm for you are at my side;  
Your rod and staff give me courage

You set a table before me as my enemies watch;  
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.  
Only goodness and love will pursue me all the days of my life  
I will dwell in the house of the Lord  
For years to come.

**Psalm 23**

*Allow for a few minutes of quiet recollection and reflection on the words of Scripture. This draws participants away from the distractions and burdens of the day and opens hearts and minds to God's word (5 -10 minutes)*

## CATECHESIS:

**Pastor or group leader** offers a brief introduction based on the following *Summary of Themes from Spe salvi* (15 minutes)

Is Christian faith relevant to life in the world? What is the connection between faith and life, between our spiritual life and our life in society? How does what I do in Church on Sunday affect, shape, inform the rest of my daily actions, choices, and experiences at home, work, and in society?

Pope Benedict offers profound insight into the deep connections that exist between what we *know* about our faith and how we *live* that faith from day to day. He reminds us that being a follower of Jesus Christ is to live differently.

To be a Christian is to not only learn *about* the Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Mary, the Bible, and the Church. To be baptized into the Christian community is to experience faith as a gift that changes every aspect of my life. Conversion, ongoing and daily conversion, is at the heart of Christian living. And this life shaping power of the Gospel is ours not only when we are in Church, but in the everyday ordinary moments of life, at home, at work, in society. Put simply, Christian faith is life transforming.

### **The Gospel is “performative”**

In *Spe salvi* Pope Benedict makes a key distinction between the Gospel as “*informative*” and the Gospel as “*performative*.” He reminds us that striving to live by Christian hope brings about a qualitative change in our daily lives. In his own words,

“The Christian message is not only “informative” but “performative.” That means: the Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known—it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing...the one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life.” (*Spe salvi*, 2)

### **Lives of the saints – lives of hope**

The lives of the saints are a powerful reminder that faith can, in fact, change every aspect of our daily life. For the saints live in hope of deeper union with God on earth and for all eternity. As “God’s fellow workers,” (SS, 35) their hope born of faith expresses itself in love of God and neighbor. To be a Christian saint is to root one’s life in hope of God’s promises.

In *Spe salvi* we read of the example of saints who discovered hope as a “sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” (Hebrews 6: 19) in the midst of extreme trials, sufferings and discouragements. The lives of Josephine Bakhita, a former African slave, and the Vietnamese martyr Paul Le-Bao-Tinh are offered to us as models of Christian hope. Both experienced the transformation of their suffering through the power of Christian hope that springs from faith in Jesus Christ.

## Jesus the Good Shepherd

Jesus the Good Shepherd is one of the earliest images of Christ in the history of Christian art. Why did the first Christians choose this image, above all, to express their understanding of who Christ was? How does the image of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, offer us new insight into the practice of Christian hope? Let's read Pope Benedict's reflections on Jesus the Good Shepherd.

And as we continue reflecting on these themes we are invited to ponder this question raised in *Spe salvi*. "Can our encounter with the God who in Christ has shown us his face and opened his heart be for us too not just "informative" but "**performative**"—that is to say, can it change our lives, so that we know that we are redeemed through the hope that it expresses?" (*Spe salvi*, 4)

**For further reading see USCCA Chapter 4 – Bringing About the Obedience of Faith**

**Now invite participants to read aloud one or more of the following passage(s) from *Spe salvi* (5 -10 mins)**

"Christianity was not only "good news"—the communication of a hitherto unknown content. In our language we would say: the Christian message was not only "informative" but "performative". That means: the Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known—it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing...the one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life." (*Spe salvi*, 2)

"Can our encounter with the God who in Christ has shown us his face and opened his heart be for us too not just "informative" but "performative"—that is to say, can it change our lives, so that we know we are redeemed through the hope that it expresses?" (*Spe salvi*, 4)

The example of a saint of our time can to some degree help us understand what it means to have a real encounter with God. I am thinking of the African Josephine Bakhita, canonized by Pope John Paul II. She was born around 1869 in Darfur in Sudan. At nine, she was kidnapped by slave-traders, beaten till she bled, and sold five times in the slave-markets of Sudan... in 1882, she was bought by an Italian merchant who returned to Italy. Here, after the terrifying "masters" who had owned her up to that point, Bakhita came to know a totally different kind of "master"—in Venetian dialect, which she was now learning, she used the name "*paron*" for the living God, the God of Jesus Christ. Up to that time she had known only masters who despised and maltreated her, or at best considered her a useful slave. Now, however, she heard that there is a "*paron*" above all masters, the Lord of all lords, and that this Lord is good, goodness in person. She came to know that this Lord even knew her, that he had created her—that he actually loved her. She too was loved, and by none other than the supreme "*Paron*", before whom all other masters are themselves no more than lowly servants. She was known and loved and she was awaited. What is more, this master had himself accepted the destiny of being flogged and now he was waiting for her "at the Father's right hand". Now she had "hope" —no longer simply the modest hope of finding masters who would be less cruel, but the great hope: "I am definitively loved and whatever happens to me—I am awaited by this Love. And so my life is good." Through the knowledge of this hope she was "redeemed," no longer a slave, but a free child of God. She understood what Paul meant when he reminded the Ephesians that previously they were without without hope *because they were without God.*" (*Spe salvi*, 3)

“We see clearly what both educated and simple people found in Christ: He tells us who man truly is and what a person must do in order to be truly human. He shows us the way, and this way is the truth. He himself is both the way and the truth, and therefore he is also the life which all of us are seeking. He also shows us the way beyond death; only someone able to do this is a true teacher of life.” (*Spe salvi*, 6)

“The same thing becomes visible in the image of the shepherd... There the shepherd was generally an expression of the dream of a tranquil and simple life, for which the people, amid the confusion of the big cities, felt a certain longing. Now the image was read as part of a new scenario which gave it a deeper content: “The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want ... Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, because you are with me” (*Ps* 23:1, 4). The true shepherd is one who knows even the path that passes through the valley of death; one who walks with me even on the path of final solitude, where no one can accompany me, guiding me through: he himself has walked this path, he has descended into the kingdom of death, he has conquered death, and he has returned to accompany us now and to give us the certainty that, together with him, we can find a way through. The realization that there is One who even in death accompanies me, and with his “rod and his staff comforts me”, so that “I fear no evil” (cf. *Ps* 23 [22]:4)—this was the new “hope” that arose over the life of believers. (*Spe salvi*, 6)

### **REFLECTION NOTES:**

Note your personal insights, questions, comments on these passages from *Spe salvi*

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**Invite** members of the group to share their personal insights and reflections on the **Summary of Themes** and the passage from *Spe salvi*. (20 minutes).

Group leader ensures that each person in the group has the opportunity to share, even briefly

**Break** if time permits (5 minutes)

***DISCUSSION:***

**Reflect** on the following **Discussion Questions** found in this Study Guide based on the themes of *Spe salvi*. (15 minutes)

1. Share what you understand by Pope Benedict's insight that Christian faith is not only "*informative*" but "*performative*" as well? How does striving to be hopeful give life a new foundation?
2. Identify one Christian saint who illustrates a life of hope.
3. Psalm 23 is a biblical prayer of hope that is familiar to us. Share insights you have gained from praying Psalm 23.

**Discussion**, whether in large or small groups, is an effective element of adult faith formation and serves to bridge faith and life, and connect the message of Christian hope to ordinary, daily experiences and to contemporary culture.

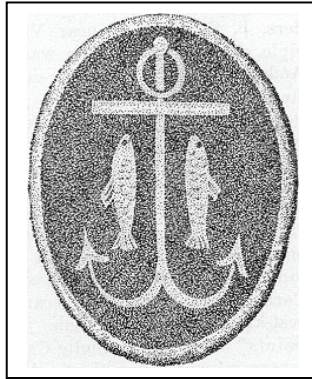
***CONCLUSION:***

Pastor or group leader briefly **summarizes** the main points that emerged from the group discussion for this session. (10 mins)

**Remind** participants of excerpts from *Spe salvi* in the next chapter as suggested readings in preparation for **Session Three**.

**Conclude** the study session with a **prayer, hymn, or scripture reading**:

**Psalm 23** –prayed or sung together



## **SESSION 3**

# **BIBLICAL WITNESS TO HOPE**

### **FOCUS OF THIS SESSION**

The Bible contains rich insight into the meaning and practice of hope. This third session opens up the riches of God's word through key biblical passages on hope. Participants reflect on the connection between faith and hope understood as a peaceful confidence and deep seated conviction in God's word. The witness of men and women who dedicate their lives to God in service to the Church as well as two ways in which hope is undermined – *despair* and *presumption* – are here discussed.

## **SESSION THREE**

### **BIBLICAL WITNESS TO HOPE**

#### **OPENING PRAYER: Prayer to the Holy Spirit**

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful. And enkindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, and we shall be created. And you will renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, instructs the hearts of the faithful. Grant that by that same Spirit, we may be truly wise, and ever rejoice in His consolations. We make our prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### **SCRIPTURE READING:**

*Invite one person to read aloud the following Scripture passage:*

“Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen. Because of it the ancients were well attested. By faith we understand that the universe was ordered by the word of God, so that what is visible came into being through the invisible...without faith it is impossible to please him, for anyone who approaches God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”  
(Hebrews 11: 1-3, 6-7)

*Allow for a few minutes of quiet recollection and reflection on the words of Scripture. This draws participants away from the distractions and burdens of the day and opens hearts and minds to God’s word (5 - 10 minutes)*

## CATECHESIS:

**Pastor or group leader** offers a brief introduction based on the following *Summary of Themes from Spe salvi* (15 minutes)

As we continue our study of the virtue of Christian hope and its place in the spiritual life we turn to the words of Scripture. In *Spe salvi*, Pope Benedict devotes several passages of the encyclical to the biblical testimony on hope. In the Bible we find that “hope” is, in fact, a key word in describing our relationship to God. In several important passages in the New Testament, particularly in the teachings of Saint Paul, we learn what it means for a Christian to daily live by hope.

In the New Testament, the virtue of hope is linked to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Those who place their trust in the saving power of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, are filled with renewed hope that comes from His Father. In this Lenten and Easter season we **too** are invited to enter more deeply into the mystery of Jesus’ saving death and resurrection. The pattern of His life, death and resurrection becomes a pattern for our own daily journeys of life. In this way we enter into the fullness of Christian hope.

**Christ is our hope.** In Christ alone we are called to place our hope. This is the gift of the sacred mysteries we celebrate during Holy Week and through the Easter season. For Jesus’ saving love poured out on the cross and His victory over sin and death in His resurrection is the trustworthy sign of the Father’s eternal love for each one of us and for humanity.

### Hope is faith-based

In the New Testament, the virtue of hope is also linked to faith. We read in the Letter to the Hebrews that, “faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen” (**Hebrews 11:1**). Our faith deepens when we place our hope in God. And our hope is strengthened and fulfilled when we see the world around us with the eyes of faith.

In the Bible, hope is also linked to a peaceful confidence, an enduring patience, a deep-seated conviction that is the fundamental attitude or defining mark of a Christian. Biblical hope is not simply a feeling. It is an act of entrusting one’s life to God in the certainty, the conviction of the Father’s love revealed in the face of His Son, Jesus Christ. For God “keeps us in the hope that does not disappoint” (**Romans 5:5**) and hope “is the sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.” (**Hebrews 6: 19-20**)

Biblical hope, then, is the virtue that keeps us from discouragement in the face of life’s anxieties and challenges. Hope re-directs our tired, troubled hearts towards God and opens up our heart in the expectation of eternal happiness with God. In the words of Saint Paul, hope is a weapon that protects us in the struggle of faith as we “put on for a helmet the hope of salvation.” (**1 Thess 5:8**)

### Offenses against hope

The Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks of two offenses against the virtue of hope. These are *despair* and *presumption* (CCC 2090 and 2091).

By *despair* one ceases to hope for personal salvation from God and for divine mercy, forgiveness and love. Despair contradicts God's infinite goodness and the divine promises to which the Lord is always faithful. The psalmist continually returns to God's faithfulness as a sign of living hope.

*Presumption* undermines hope in two ways. To presume upon our own human and limited capacities we hope to be saved without help from God. Or we can presume upon God's almighty power and mercy hoping to obtain happiness with God without the effort of ongoing conversion. The witness of biblical hope challenges us to entrust our lives to God with certainty, in confidence, in patience, and in joyful expectation.

**For further reading see USCCA Chapter 3 – Proclaim the Gospel to Every Creature**

**Now *invite* participants to read aloud one or more of the following passage(s) from *Spe salvi* (5 -10 mins)**

“We must listen a little more closely to the Bible's testimony on hope. “Hope”, in fact, is a key word in Biblical faith—so much so that in several passages the words “faith” and “hope” seem interchangeable. Thus the *Letter to the Hebrews* closely links the “fullness of faith” (10:22) to “the confession of our hope without wavering” (10:23). Likewise, when the *First Letter of Peter* exhorts Christians to be always ready to give an answer concerning the *logos*—the meaning and the reason—of their hope (cf. 3:15), “hope” is equivalent to “faith”...when we compare the Christian life with life prior to faith, or with the situation of the followers of other religions. Paul reminds the Ephesians that before their encounter with Christ they were “without hope and without God in the world” (*Eph* 2:12)... In the same vein Paul says to the Thessalonians: you must not “grieve as others do who have no hope” (*1 Th* 4:13). Here we see as a distinguishing mark of Christians the fact that they have a future: it is not that they know the details of what awaits them, but they know in general terms that their life will not end in emptiness.” (*Spe salvi*, 2)

“In the eleventh chapter of the *Letter to the Hebrews* (v. 1) we find a kind of definition of faith which closely links this virtue with hope...The sentence reads as follows: faith is the “substance” of things hoped for; the proof of things not seen. Saint Thomas Aquinas, using the terminology of the philosophical tradition to which he belonged, explains it as follows: faith is a *habitus*, that is, a stable disposition of the spirit, through which eternal life takes root in us and reason is led to consent to what it does not see. (*Spe salvi*, 7)

“Faith is not merely a personal reaching out towards things to come that are still totally absent: it gives us something. It gives us even now something of the reality we are waiting for, and this present reality constitutes for us a “proof” of the things that are still unseen. Faith draws the future into the present, so that it is no longer simply a “not yet”. The fact that this future exists changes the present; the present is touched by the future reality, and thus the things of the future spill over into those of the present and those of the present into those of the future.” (*Spe salvi*, 7)

“Above all, it is seen in the great acts of renunciation, from the monks of ancient times to Saint Francis of Assisi and those of our contemporaries who enter modern religious Institutes and movements and leave everything for love of Christ, so as to bring to men and women the faith and love of Christ, and to help those who are suffering in body and spirit. In their case, the new “substance” has proved to be a genuine “substance”; from the hope of these people who have been touched by Christ, hope has arisen for others who were living in darkness and without hope. In their case, it has been demonstrated that this new life truly possesses and is “substance” that calls forth life for others. For us who contemplate these figures, their way of acting and living is *de facto* a “proof” that the things to come, the promise of Christ, are not only a reality that we await, but a real presence.” (*Spe salvi*, 8)

“In the tenth chapter of the *Letter to the Hebrews*. I refer to the words *hypomone* (10:36) and *hypostole* (10:39). *Hypo-mone* is normally translated as “patience”—perseverance, constancy. Knowing how to wait, while patiently enduring trials, is necessary for the believer to be able to “receive what is promised” (10:36)... the word indicates a lived hope, a life based on the certainty of hope. In the New Testament this expectation of God, this standing with God, takes on a new significance: in Christ, God has revealed himself. He has already communicated to us the “substance” of things to come, and thus the expectation of God acquires a new certainty.” (*Spe salvi*, 9)

**REFLECTION NOTES:**

Note your personal insights, questions, comments on these passages from *Spe salvi*

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**Invite** members of the group to share their personal insights and reflections on the **Summary of Themes** and the passage from *Spe salvi*. (20 minutes).

Group leader ensures that each person in the group has the opportunity to share, even briefly

**Break** if time permits (5 minutes)

***DISCUSSION:***

***Reflect on*** the following **Discussion Questions** found in this Study Guide based on the themes of *Spe salvi*. (15 minutes)

1. Share one new insight you have gained from reflecting on the Bible's teachings on hope. How is the biblical notion of hope different from a modern understanding of hope as "faith in progress." (*See Spe salvi, 17, 20-21*)
2. Share concrete ways in which this Lenten and Easter season is a time of renewed hope for you?
3. Pope Benedict highlights the witness of clergy and members of religious communities. How does their life especially witness to living by Christian hope? (*Spe salvi, 8*)

***Discussion***, whether in large or small groups, is an effective element of adult faith formation and serves to bridge faith and life, and connect the message of Christian hope to ordinary, daily experiences and to contemporary culture.

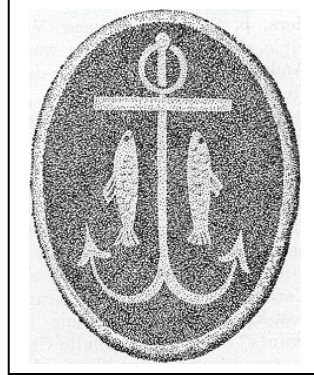
***CONCLUSION:***

Pastor or group leader briefly ***summarizes*** the main points that emerged from the group discussion for this session. (10 mins)

***Remind*** participants of excerpts from *Spe salvi* in the next chapter as suggested readings in preparation for **Session Four**.

***Conclude*** the study session with a **prayer, hymn, or scripture reading**:

**Hebrews 11: 1-3, 6-7**



## **SESSION FOUR**

# **THE SACRAMENTS AND CHRISTIAN HOPE**

### **FOCUS OF THIS SESSION**

How do the sacraments of the Church instill, nourish and strengthen a life of hope? This is the focus of the fourth study session in which participants are invited to consider anew the meaning of their baptism and how the Eucharist directs and fulfills our human hopes in Christ. Reconciliation is discussed as another rich sacramental means by which the Church offers the healing love of Christ and renewed hope in the face of our weakness and human sinfulness. Each of the sacraments as sacraments of hope remind of our need to rely on God's help and abiding presence on the daily journey of faith.

## **SESSION FOUR**

### **THE SACRAMENTS AND CHRISTIAN HOPE**

#### **OPENING PRAYER: Prayer to the Holy Spirit**

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful. And enkindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, and we shall be created. And you will renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, instructs the hearts of the faithful. Grant that by that same Spirit, we may be truly wise, and ever rejoice in His consolations. We make our prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### **SCRIPTURE READING:**

*Invite one person to read aloud the following Scripture passage:*

“What then shall we say? Shall we persist in sin that grace may abound? Of course not! How can we who died to sin yet live in it? Or are you unaware that we who were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.”

(Romans 6: 1-4)

*Allow for a few minutes of quiet recollection and reflection on the words of Scripture. This draws participants away from the distractions and burdens of the day and opens hearts and minds to God’s word (5 - 10 minutes)*

## CATECHESIS:

**Pastor or group leader** offers a brief introduction based on the following *Summary of Themes from Spe salvi* (15 minutes)

“What do you ask of the Church?” Answer: “Faith.” “And what does faith give you?” “Eternal life.”

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1210 -1284) teaches that the Sacraments of Initiation – Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist – are the sacramental means by which infants, children and adults are initiated into a new life of faith, hope and love. As we continue our study of *Spe salvi*, the papal encyclical on Christian hope, we turn our attention to the relationship of the sacraments to living the virtue of hope.

### **Baptism and hope**

Our life of faith begins with the Church’s offer of eternal life in communion with the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Right at the very beginning of the spiritual life, the sacrament of baptism orients our life to the hope of eternity in the Father’s house with Christ the Lord. As parents of a newly baptized child enter into a dialogue of faith with the Church they acknowledge that the faith into which their child is baptized gives him or her nothing less than eternal happiness with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But what does it mean to gain “eternal life?”

Whether we were baptized as infants or as adults, the event of our baptism marked a turning point, a special event of grace. At baptism we are initiated into the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And this new life in Christ, into which we are baptized, is at the heart of our observance of Lent and our celebration of Easter.

### **Eucharist and hope**

The Eucharist, as the “source and summit” of the Christian life, nourishes us with the Lord’s own Body and Blood. As Saint Augustine reminds us, at each Eucharist we “become what we receive,” that is, we become time and time again members of Christ’s own Body in the world.

The Eucharist is sacrifice, thanksgiving, memorial and presence (CCC 1356 – 1372). **It is also a sacrament of hope.** For we believe as Catholics that the earthly liturgy is, at the same time, a sharing in the heavenly liturgy. Heaven and earth intersect at every liturgy so that as we celebrate fully, consciously and actively we experience a glimpse, a foretaste of that for which we were created for – happiness in the presence of God our Creator and the communion of saints. Every human hope is directed to the Father and fulfilled by His Son, Jesus Christ, in and through the Eucharist.

## **Reconciliation and hope**

The sacrament of Reconciliation is, in particular, a sacrament of Christian hope. For Reconciliation invites us out of the despair that can arise from human weakness and sin to return to our new life in Jesus Christ. Hope is reawakened in our hearts as we come to the sacrament of Reconciliation. For there we encounter once again the Lord's faithfulness as the One who forgives, heals, restores, and converts.

Hearing the healing words of absolution spoken by the priest, "I absolve you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," we are filled with hope in God's mercy and in our graced capacity for ongoing conversion. In the same way, the Anointing of the Sick too brings to those suffering in mind and body the hope of healing and rest with God.

The sacraments nourish and deepen hope as they direct our basic human desire for happiness to love of God and love of neighbor. With our limited human powers we cannot fully respond to the divine love. But we can hope that God will give us the capacity to love Him in return and to love others with God's own love. The sacraments of hope strengthen and renew us on our daily journey of faith.

**For further reading see USCCA Chapter 14 – The Celebration of the Paschal Mystery of Christ**

**Now *invite* participants to read aloud one or more of the following passage(s) from *Spe salvi* (5 -10 mins)**

"I would like to begin with the classical form of the dialogue with which the rite of Baptism expressed the reception of an infant into the community of believers and the infant's rebirth in Christ. First of all the priest asked what name the parents had chosen for the child, and then he continued with the question: "What do you ask of the Church?" Answer: "Faith". "And what does faith give you?" "Eternal life." According to this dialogue, the parents were seeking access to the faith for their child, communion with believers, because they saw in faith the key to "eternal life." Today as in the past, this is what being baptized, becoming Christians, is all about: it is not just an act of socialization within the community, not simply a welcome into the Church. The parents expect more for the one to be baptized: they expect that faith, which includes the corporeal nature of the Church and her sacraments, will give life to their child—eternal life. Faith is the substance of hope." (*Spe salvi*, 10)

"The term "eternal life" is intended to give a name to this known "unknown." Inevitably it is an inadequate term that creates confusion. "Eternal," in fact, suggests to us the idea of something interminable, and this frightens us; "life" makes us think of the life that we know and love and do not want to lose, even though very often it brings more toil than satisfaction, so that while on the one hand we desire it, on the other hand we do not want it. To imagine ourselves outside the temporality that imprisons us and in some way to sense that eternity is not an unending succession of days in the calendar, but something more like the supreme moment of satisfaction, in which totality embraces us and we embrace totality—this we can only attempt. It would be like plunging into the ocean of infinite love, a moment in which time—the before and after—no longer exists. We can only attempt to grasp

the idea that such a moment is life in the full sense, a plunging ever anew into the vastness of being, in which we are simply overwhelmed with joy. This is how Jesus expresses it in Saint John's Gospel: "I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (16:22). We must think along these lines if we want to understand the object of Christian hope, to understand what it is that our faith, our being with Christ, leads us to expect" (*Spe salvi*, 12)

"It is not science that redeems man: man is redeemed by love. This applies even in terms of this present world. When someone has the experience of a great love in his life, this is a moment of "redemption" which gives a new meaning to his life. But soon he will also realize that the love bestowed upon him cannot by itself resolve the question of his life. It is a love that remains fragile. It can be destroyed by death. The human being needs unconditional love. He needs the certainty which makes him say: "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (*Rom* 8:38- 39). If this absolute love exists, with its absolute certainty, then—only then—is man "redeemed", whatever should happen to him in his particular circumstances. This is what it means to say: Jesus Christ has "redeemed" us. Through him we have become certain of God, a God who is not a remote "first cause" of the world, because his only-begotten Son has become man and of him everyone can say: "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (*Gal* 2:20)." (*Spe salvi*, 26)

## REFLECTION NOTES:

Note your personal insights, questions, comments on these passages from *Spe salvi*

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**Invite** members of the group to share their personal insights and reflections on the **Summary of Themes** and the passage from *Spe salvi*. (20 minutes).

Group leader ensures that each person in the group has the opportunity to share, even briefly

**Break** if time permits (5 minutes)

***DISCUSSION:***

***Reflect on*** the following **Discussion Questions** found in this Study Guide based on the themes of *Spe salvi*. (15 minutes)

1. How does Baptism mark the beginnings of Christian hope in our life?
2. When you attend Mass how is your hope renewed and strengthened at each Eucharist.
3. Share how the sacrament of Reconciliation is a powerful source of Christian hope?

***Discussion***, whether in large or small groups, is an effective element of adult faith formation and serves to bridge faith and life, and connect the message of Christian hope to ordinary, daily experiences and to contemporary culture.

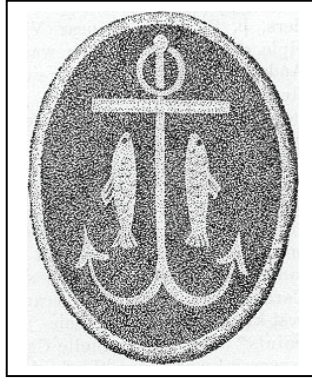
***CONCLUSION:***

Pastor or group leader briefly ***summarizes*** the main points that emerged from the group discussion for this session. (10 mins)

***Remind*** participants of excerpts from *Spe salvi* in the next chapter as suggested readings in preparation for **Session Five**.

***Conclude*** the study session with a **prayer, hymn, or scripture reading**:

**Luke 24: 13 – 32** (Disciples encounter the Risen Lord on the Road to Emmaus)



## SESSION FIVE

# THE SOCIAL NATURE OF HOPE

### FOCUS OF THIS SESSION

A Christian cannot be a “lone ranger,” it has been said. Session Five focuses on the **social** and **communal** nature of Christian hope. The Church is the very foundation, source and sustainer of faith and hope. To belong to the community of the Church is to experience this profound unity of faith, hope and love. This session challenges participants to recognize that they are each linked to a great chain of believers, the communion of saints that is the Church. To live in Christian hope is to live *with* others and *for* others.

## **SESSION FIVE**

### **THE SOCIAL NATURE OF CHRISTIAN HOPE**

#### **OPENING PRAYER: Prayer to the Holy Spirit**

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful. And enkindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, and we shall be created. And you will renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, instructs the hearts of the faithful. Grant that by that same Spirit, we may be truly wise, and ever rejoice in His consolations. We make our prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### **SCRIPTURE READING:**

*Invite one person to read aloud the following Scripture passage:*

“For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually parts of one another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them: if prophecy, in proportion to the faith; if ministry, in ministering; if one is a teacher, in teaching; if one exhorts, in exhortations; if one contributes in generosity; if one is over others, with diligence; if one does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. “ **Romans 12: 3 - 8**

*Allow for a few minutes of quiet recollection and reflection on the words of Scripture. This draws participants away from the distractions and burdens of the day and opens hearts and minds to God’s word (5 - 10 minutes)*

## CATECHESIS:

**Pastor or group leader** offers a brief introduction based on the following *Summary of Themes from Spe salvi* (15 minutes)

“My faith is my *private* search for the salvation of my soul.” “My *personal* journey with God is what defines my spirituality” “Have you accepted Jesus as your *personal* Lord and Savior?” Perhaps these words sound familiar. Perhaps you’ve heard such phrases in speaking with friends, family, neighbors, and members of your community.

In *Spe salvi*, Pope Benedict devotes several paragraphs to reflecting on the **social** nature of Christian hope. He invites us to see the community of believers as the foundational soil in which Christian hope is planted, nourished and grows. This is a somewhat countercultural idea for we live in an individualistic society that emphasizes independence, the self-made person, and prizes individual achievement.

**“How did we arrive at this interpretation of the “salvation of the soul” as a flight from responsibility for the whole, and how did we come to conceive the Christian project as a selfish search for salvation which rejects the idea of serving others?” (*Spe salvi*, 16). With these questions from *Spe salvi* we now turn to reflect on the communal nature of Christian hope.**

### **The human person and community**

To be human is to depend on others. From the time we are born to the time we die we depend on others in the community – parents, family, teachers, friends, neighbors, society. The same is true of our spiritual life. For God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is a community of divine persons.

To be a Christian then is to belong to a community of faith, the community that is the Body of Christ, the Church. Before we strive to live a life of faith, hope and love we receive it from others because “it is the Church that believes first, and so bears, nourishes and sustain my faith” (CCC 168).

The Catechism teaches that, “faith is not an isolated act. No one can believe alone, just as no one lives alone. You have not given yourself faith as you have not given yourself life. The believer has received faith from others and should hand it on to others. Our love for Jesus and for our neighbor impels us to speak to others about our faith. Each believer is thus a link in the great chain of believers. I cannot believe without being carried by the faith of others, and by my faith I support others in the faith (CCC 166).

Belonging to the Catholic Church is not simply having a background in which my individual journey of faith unfolds. The Church *is* the very foundation, the source and sustainer of faith. Without the community of faith our beliefs quickly fade into self-absorption and self-love. Within the Church “our love of God is revealed as responsibility for others” (*Spe salvi*, 28)

Saint Augustine experienced the social nature of hope in a dramatic way. After his conversion he desired a contemplative life of solitude dedicated to God. Instead he found that he was called to serve the people of God in active ministry as priest and bishop. “Christ died for all. To live for him means allowing oneself to be drawn into his *being for others*.” (*Spe salvi*, 28)

Reflect on your hopes and desires – both human and spiritual. Do our hopes lead to greater love of others, to deeper concern for the poor and the most vulnerable in society? Does our practice of hope lead us to put the needs of others before our own? How are you already living the virtue of hope through your self-sacrificial love of others?

To live by Christian hope is to recognize that faith cannot grow without the community of Christian disciples. While each one of our spiritual journeys are unique and distinctly personal, we are intrinsically linked by faith to the communion of the Church and the communion of the saints. To live in hope is to hear this call to communion – with God and with our neighbor.

**For further reading see USCCA Chapter 10 – The Church: Reflecting the Light of Christ**

**Now invite participants to read aloud one or more of the following passage(s) from *Spe salvi* (5 -10 mins)**

“How could the idea have developed that Jesus's message is narrowly individualistic and aimed only at each person singly? How did we arrive at this interpretation of the “salvation of the soul” as a flight from responsibility for the whole, and how did we come to conceive the Christian project as a selfish search for salvation which rejects the idea of serving others? In order to find an answer to this we must take a look at the foundations of the modern age.” (*Spe salvi*, 16)

“Salvation has always been considered a “social” reality. Indeed, the *Letter to the Hebrews* speaks of a “city” (cf. 11:10, 16; 12:22; 13:14) and therefore of communal salvation. Consistently with this view, sin is understood by the Fathers as the destruction of the unity of the human race, as fragmentation and division. Babel, the place where languages were confused, the place of separation, is seen to be an expression of what sin fundamentally is. Hence “redemption” appears as the reestablishment of unity, in which we come together once more in a union that begins to take shape in the world community of believers.” (*Spe salvi*, 14)

“This real life, towards which we try to reach out again and again, is linked to a lived union with a “people”, and for each individual it can only be attained within this “we”. It presupposes that we escape from the prison of our “I”, because only in the openness of this universal subject does our gaze open out to the source of joy, to love itself—to God.” (*Spe salvi*, 14)

“...Up to the (modern) time, the recovery of what man had lost through the expulsion from Paradise was expected from faith in Jesus Christ: herein lay “redemption”. Now, this “redemption”, the restoration of the lost “Paradise” is no longer expected from faith, but from the newly discovered link between science and praxis. It is not that faith is simply denied; rather it is displaced onto another level—that of purely private and otherworldly affairs—and at the same time it becomes somehow irrelevant for the world. This programmatic vision has determined the trajectory of modern times and it also shapes the present-day crisis of faith which is essentially a crisis of Christian hope. (*Spe salvi*, 17)

“No one lives alone. No one sins alone. No one is saved alone. The lives of others continually spill over into mine; in what I think, say, do and achieve...our hope is always essentially also hope for others; only thus is it truly hope for me too. As a Christian we should never limit ourselves to asking: how can I save myself? We should also ask: what can I do in order that others may be saved and that for them too the star of hope may rise? Then I would have done my utmost for my own personal salvation as well” (*Spe salvi*, 48).

“This is what Augustine set out to do: to transmit hope, the hope which came to him from faith” (*Spe salvi*, 29).

“Bernard of Clairvaux, who inspired a multitude of young people to enter the monasteries of his reformed Order, had quite a different perspective on this. In his view, monks perform a task for the whole Church and hence also for the world. He uses many images to illustrate the responsibility that monks have towards the entire body of the Church, and indeed towards humanity; he applies to them the words of pseudo-Rufinus: “The human race lives thanks to a few; were it not for them, the world would perish” (*Spe salvi*, 15)

### **REFLECTION NOTES:**

Note your personal insights, questions, comments on these passages from *Spe salvi*

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**Invite** members of the group to share their personal insights and reflections on the **Summary of Themes** and the passage from *Spe salvi*. (20 minutes).

Group leader ensures that each person in the group has the opportunity to share, even briefly

**Break** if time permits (5 minutes)

***DISCUSSION:***

***Reflect on*** the following **Discussion Questions** found in this Study Guide based on the themes of *Spe salvi*. (15 minutes)

1. Share how you already live by Christian hope through daily self-sacrifice for others. How do we continue being a *person for others*?
2. “Faith is a private matter between God and me.” Discuss this statement in the context of the insights of Pope Benedict on the ***social*** nature of Christian hope
3. Share some concrete ways in which your parish, your faith community, and the diocese nourishes and sustains your hope.

***Discussion***, whether in large or small groups, is an effective element of adult faith formation and serves to bridge faith and life, and connect the message of Christian hope to ordinary, daily experiences and to contemporary culture.

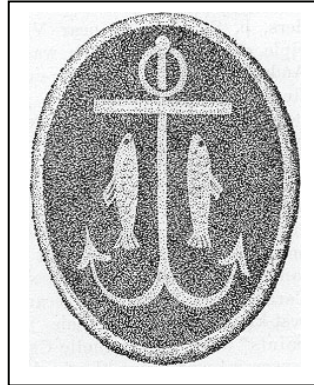
***CONCLUSION:***

Pastor or group leader briefly ***summarizes*** the main points that emerged from the group discussion for this session. (10 mins)

***Remind*** participants of excerpts from *Spe salvi* in the next chapter as suggested readings in preparation for **Session Six**.

***Conclude*** the study session with a **prayer, hymn, or scripture reading**:

Psalm 122



## SESSION SIX

# PRAYER, ACTION, SUFFERING – SCHOOLS OF CHRISTIAN HOPE

### FOCUS OF THIS SESSION

“How do I grow in faith, practically speaking?” In *Spe salvi* Pope Benedict speaks of three “schools of hope,” namely prayer, action and suffering. These “schools of hope” are the focus of this sixth study session as participants share how they deepen their commitment to daily prayer, make sense of human suffering, and begin the spiritual practice of “offering up” hardships to God. The insight of Saint Augustine on prayer as an expanding and stretching of the heart so that we may be filled with the hope that comes from God is also discussed.

## **SESSION SIX**

### **PRAYER, ACTION, SUFFERING – SCHOOLS OF HOPE**

#### **OPENING PRAYER: Prayer to the Holy Spirit**

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful. And enkindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, and we shall be created. And you will renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, instructs the hearts of the faithful. Grant that by that same Spirit, we may be truly wise, and ever rejoice in His consolations. We make our prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### **SCRIPTURE READING:**

*Invite one person to read aloud the following Scripture passage:*

“My soul, be at rest in God alone,  
from whom comes my hope.  
God alone is my rock and my salvation,  
my secure height; I shall not fall.  
My safety and glory are with God,  
my strong rock and refuge.  
Trust God at all times, my people!  
Pour out your hearts to God our refuge!”

Psalm 62: 6-9

*Allow for a few minutes of quiet recollection and reflection on the words of Scripture. This draws participants away from the distractions and burdens of the day and opens hearts and minds to God’s word (5 - 10 minutes)*

## CATECHESIS:

**Pastor or group leader** offers a brief introduction based on the following *Summary of Themes from Spe salvi* (15 minutes)

How do we grow in the virtue of Christian hope? How might this study of the papal encyclical remain not simply an intellectual exercise but one that bears fruit in my spiritual life? How have our reflections in these weeks prepare us now to hear the Pope's message of hope during his visit to Washington?

Prayer is the essential path by which we grow in hope. In *Spe salvi*, Pope Benedict XVI offers three settings for learning and practicing hope – **prayer, action and suffering**. Here theology meets life, and faith is intimately linked to human experience.

### **Prayer nourishes hope**

Christian prayer is both personal and communal; it is our personal and living encounter with the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit, and it is formed by and joined to the great prayers of the Church and the saints. But the hectic pace of daily life and the many responsibilities and challenges of our day distract us away from prayer. The time, little as it may be, that we do give to prayer is often clouded by distractions, worries and the demands of our daily schedules.

Saint Augustine offers a striking image for what happens when we place ourselves in God's presence in daily prayer. In prayer, Augustine writes, our hearts are stretched, enlarged, expanded so that we deepen our desire for God. As the heart is stretched toward God we are filled with hope.

### **Suffering deepens hope**

In the same way suffering – physical, emotional, psychological – provides another path to deepen our hope in the promises of the Father. As Christians we look to the sufferings of our Lord on the cross to understand the meaning of human suffering. As Pope Benedict writes, “each human person is worth so much to God that he himself became man in order to *suffer with* humanity in an utterly real way – in flesh and blood – as is revealed to us in Jesus' passion.” (*Spe salvi*, 39)

But is it a contradiction to say that suffering deepens hope? Society and popular culture view human suffering as something to be avoided, postponed, done away with. In facing issues of life and death, we are challenged with the question of the meaning of human suffering.

“He will come again to judge the living and the dead.” Praying these words of the Creed we are given another dimension of Christian hope – the Last Judgment of the world. “From the earliest times, the prospect of the Last Judgment has influenced Christians in their daily living as a criterion by which to order their present life, as a summons to conscience, and at the same time as hope in God's justice.” (SS, 41 - 48)

## Revisiting the spiritual practice of “Offering Up”

One concrete spiritual practice that Pope Benedict highlights in *Spe salvi* is the habit of “**offering up**” to God all the daily hardships – great and small – that weigh us down. By “offering up” our difficulties and worries to God we make room for peace, joy and hope in our hearts.

But what does it mean to “offer up” hardships and difficulties to God? Is it simply being able to “grin and bear it?” Does “offering up” mean that I simply deny or hold back negative feelings of hurt, anger, irritation? Pope Benedict warns against some of the unhealthy expressions of this spiritual practice. “Offering up” is not simply a matter of being able to “grin and bear it,” nor is it a cold detachment from the hardships of daily life.

“Offering up” is not a “no,” or a denial of life’s struggles but a “yes,” a positive affirmation of the God’s loving presence and guiding hand even in the midst of them. By our “offering up” we are spiritually united with the Father, through His Son in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The act of “offering up” then is a **letting go** of all the minor and major irritations of ordinary life, those particular things, actions or persons that trouble us, drag us down, discourage or upset us. In making an “offering” to God, each day and from moment to moment, we learn to entrust our lives in hope to the love and abiding presence of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Pope Benedict describes this spiritual practice that can fill us with hope in the ordinary moments of each day in this way:

“There used to be a form of devotion—perhaps less practiced today but quite widespread not long ago—that included the idea of “offering up” the minor daily hardships that continually strike at us like irritating “jabs”, thereby giving them a meaning...What does it mean to offer something up? Those who did so were convinced that they could insert these little annoyances into Christ's great “compassion” so that they somehow became part of the treasury of compassion so greatly needed by the human race. In this way, even the small inconveniences of daily life could acquire meaning and contribute to the economy of good and of human love.” (*Spe salvi*, 40)

**For further reading see USCCA Chapter 35 – God Calls Us to Pray and Chapter 36 - Jesus Taught Us to Pray**

**Now invite participants to read aloud one or more of the following passage(s) from *Spe salvi* (5 -10 mins)**

“A first essential setting for learning hope is prayer. When no one listens to me any more, God still listens to me. When I can no longer talk to anyone or call upon anyone, I can always talk to God. When there is no longer anyone to help me deal with a need or expectation that goes beyond the human capacity for hope, he can help me<sup>[25]</sup>. When plunged into complete solitude; if I pray I am never totally alone.” (*Spe salvi*, 32)

“Saint Augustine, in a homily on the *First Letter of John*, describes very beautifully the intimate relationship between prayer and hope. He defines prayer as an exercise of desire. Man was created for greatness—for God himself; he was created to be filled by God. But his heart is too small for the greatness to which it is destined. It must be stretched. “By delaying [his gift], God strengthens our desire; through desire he enlarges our soul and by expanding it he increases its capacity [for receiving him]”. Augustine refers to Saint Paul, who speaks of himself as straining forward to the things that are to come (cf. *Phil 3:13*). He then uses a very beautiful image to describe this process of enlargement and preparation of the human heart. “Suppose that God wishes to fill you with honey [a symbol of God's tenderness and goodness]; but if you are full of vinegar, where will you put the honey?” The vessel, that is your heart, must first be enlarged and then cleansed, freed from the vinegar and its taste. This requires hard work and is painful, but in this way alone do we become suited to that for which we are destined” (*Spe salvi*, 33)

“For prayer to develop this power of purification, it must on the one hand be something very personal, an encounter between my intimate self and God, the living God. On the other hand it must be constantly guided and enlightened by the great prayers of the Church and of the saints, by liturgical prayer, in which the Lord teaches us again and again how to pray properly” (*Spe salvi*, 34)

“It is not by sidestepping or fleeing from suffering that we are healed, but rather by our capacity for accepting it, maturing through it and finding meaning through union with Christ, who suffered with infinite love” (*Spe salvi*, 37)

“God cannot suffer, but he can *suffer with*. Man is worth so much to God that he himself became man in order to *suffer with* man in an utterly real way—in flesh and blood—as is revealed to us in the account of Jesus's Passion. Hence in all human suffering we are joined by one who experiences and carries that suffering *with* us; hence *con-solatio* is present in all suffering, the consolation of God's compassionate love—and so the star of hope rises. Certainly, in our many different sufferings and trials we always need the lesser and greater hopes too—a kind visit, the healing of internal and external wounds, a favorable resolution of a crisis, and so on. In our lesser trials these kinds of hope may even be sufficient. But in truly great trials, where I must make a definitive decision to place the truth before my own welfare, career and possessions, I need the certitude of that true, great hope of which we have spoken here” (*Spe salvi*, 39)

“The true measure of humanity is essentially determined in relationship to suffering and to the sufferer. This holds true both for the individual and for society. A society unable to accept its suffering members and incapable of helping to share their suffering and to bear it inwardly through “compassion” is a cruel and inhuman society...Indeed, to accept the “other” who suffers, means that I take up his suffering in such a way that it becomes mine also. Because it has now become a shared suffering, though, in which another person is present, this suffering is penetrated by the light of love. The Latin word *con-solatio*, “consolation”, expresses this beautifully. It suggests *being with* the other in his solitude, so that it ceases to be solitude.” (*Spe salvi*, 38)

## REFLECTION NOTES:

Note your personal insights, questions, comments on these passages from *Spe salvi*

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**Invite** members of the group to share their personal insights and reflections on the **Summary of Themes** and the passage from *Spe salvi*. (20 minutes).

Group leader ensures that each person in the group has the opportunity to share, even briefly

**Break** if time permits (5 minutes)

## DISCUSSION:

**Reflect on** the following **Discussion Questions** found in this Study Guide based on the themes of *Spe salvi*. (15 minutes)

1. What hardship can you “offer up” to God each day? How might this spiritual practice deepen the virtue of hope?
2. To say that suffering is a path to hope might seem like a contradiction. Discuss how a Christian understanding of suffering does, in fact, lead to hope?
3. Share practical ways in which you sustain and renew your commitment to daily prayer?

**Discussion**, whether in large or small groups, is an effective element of adult faith formation and serves to bridge faith and life, and connect the message of Christian hope to ordinary, daily experiences and to contemporary culture.

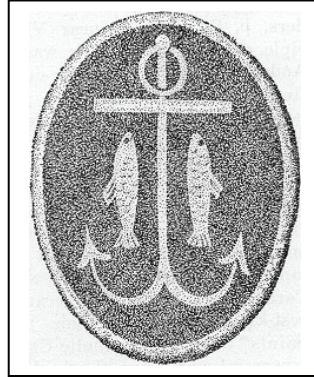
***CONCLUSION:***

Pastor or group leader briefly *summarizes* the main points that emerged from the group discussion for this session. (10 mins)

***Remind*** participants of excerpts from *Spe salvi* in the next chapter as suggested readings in preparation for **Session Seven**.

***Conclude*** the study session with a **prayer, hymn, or scripture reading:**

**Psalm 34: 1 - 9**



## **SESSION SEVEN**

# **BECOMING MINISTERS OF HOPE**

### **FOCUS OF THIS SESSION**

How have these study sessions helped to move from being spectators of the papal visit to experiencing a moment of renewed faith, hope and love? How are we, as Christians, called to give an “account for the hope that is in us?” How do we become ministers of hope to others? In this final study session, participants are invited to share how their study of *Spe salvi* has helped to prepare them for the upcoming visit of Pope Benedict XVI. The sense of unity with the successor of Saint Peter and their connectedness beyond their parish and across the diocese will frame the final discussion on how each participant is now better prepared to welcome Pope Benedict XVI.

## **SESSION SEVEN – Becoming Ministers of Hope**

### **OPENING PRAYER: Prayer to the Holy Spirit**

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful. And enkindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, and we shall be created. And you will renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, instructs the hearts of the faithful. Grant that by that same Spirit, we may be truly wise, and ever rejoice in His consolations. We make our prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **SCRIPTURE READING:**

*Invite one person to read aloud the following Scripture passages:*

“Always be ready to give an answer for the reason for your hope.” 1 Peter 3:15

“Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”  
Hebrews 10: 23

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15: 13)

*Allow for a few minutes of quiet recollection and reflection on the words of Scripture. This draws participants away from the distractions and burdens of the day and opens hearts and minds to God’s word (5 - 10 minutes)*

## CATECHESIS:

***Pastor or group leader*** offers a brief introduction based on the following ***Summary of Themes from Spe salvi*** (15 minutes)

Soon Pope Benedict XVI begins his apostolic visit to America. As we, the faithful of the Archdiocese of Washington, prepare to welcome him we bring with us the fruit of our study, reflection, and discussion over these past weeks.

In this final study week we turn to the question – how might our reflections on the meaning and practice of Christian hope be truly life transforming?

Pope Benedict comes to us as a ***minister of hope***. As we hear his words at each stop of the papal visit we might reflect on how his teachings and message brings a renewed sense of hope to us personally, to our parish, our archdiocese and to society?

***“Christ Our Hope.”*** This theme of the papal visit reminds us that as Christians the one in whom we hope is none other than the person of Jesus Christ himself. Our human hopes and desires find their perfect fulfillment in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is why we can say with confidence that in Christ we have more than enough reason to hope.

To be a hopeful person is to be hopeful for others. As Christian disciples we are also called to offer to others “an account for the hope that is in us.” (1 Peter 3: 15). And with Christ we lift up and sustain, with the strength of our hope, those in our homes, families and communities who are burdened and overwhelmed by hopelessness. The papal visit we now anticipate eagerly will remind us that we each share in the Church’s ministry of hope.

At home, in places of work, our neighborhoods and in society we are each called, in different ways, to be in turn *ministers of hope*.

### **A Papal Ministry of Hope**

To begin his apostolic visit to Washington, Pope Benedict will meet with President Bush at the White House on April 16. Then he gathers with bishops of the United States. The dialogue of faith and culture, and the realms of spiritual and political leadership will mark this day on which the Pope also celebrates his 81<sup>st</sup> birthday.

On Thursday, April 17, Pope Benedict celebrates Mass with the faithful of the Archdiocese of Washington. This Eucharist will be a special moment when we unite ourselves with the successor of Saint Peter at the table of God’s word and sacrament. Later that day the Holy Father meets with Catholic educators to highlight the Church’s mission of Catholic education as the privileged means by which Christian hope is nurtured in the faithful and in society. Then the Pope will engage in a dialogue of faith with representatives of other religions.

One of many poignant moments of the papal visit to America will undoubtedly be the visit of Pope Benedict to Ground Zero, the scene of stark hopelessness during the terror attacks of 9/11. Few other moments can visually capture the power of Christian hope as the answer to human despair.

**“Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”** As the Catholic faithful of Washington we pray these words of the Our Father at the end of Mass. The papal visit that we now eagerly anticipate will be, from beginning to end, a graced manifestation of God’s kingdom at work among us. Together we now welcome Pope Benedict with joy, with love, and renewed hope.

**Now *invite* participants to read aloud one or more of the following passage(s) from *Spe salvi* (5 -10 mins)**

“Praying must always involve this intermingling of public and personal prayer. This is how we can speak to God and how God speaks to us. In this way we undergo those purifications by which we become open to God and are prepared for the service of our fellow human beings. We become capable of the great hope, **and thus we become ministers of hope for others.** (*Spe salvi*, 34)

“Hope in a Christian sense is always hope for others as well. It is an active hope, in which we struggle to prevent things moving towards the “perverse end”. It is an active hope also in the sense that we keep the world open to God. Only in this way does it continue to be a truly human hope” (*Spe salvi*, 34)

“First we must ask ourselves: what does “progress” really mean; what does it promise and what does it not promise? In the nineteenth century, faith in progress was already subject to critique. In the twentieth century, Theodor W. Adorno formulated the problem of faith in progress quite drastically: he said that progress, seen accurately, is progress from the sling to the atom bomb. Now this is certainly an aspect of progress that must not be concealed. To put it another way: the ambiguity of progress becomes evident. Without doubt, it offers new possibilities for good, but it also opens up appalling possibilities for evil—possibilities that formerly did not exist. We have all witnessed the way in which progress, in the wrong hands, can become and has indeed become a terrifying progress in evil. If technical progress is not matched by corresponding progress in man's ethical formation, in man's inner, then it is not progress at all, but a threat for man and for the world.” (*Spe salvi*, 22)

“It is the expectation of things to come from the perspective of a present that is already given. It is a looking-forward in Christ's presence, with Christ who is present, to the perfecting of his Body, to his definitive coming. The word *hypostole*, on the other hand, means shrinking back through lack of courage to speak openly and frankly a truth that may be dangerous. Hiding through a spirit of fear leads to “destruction” (*Heb 10:39*). “God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control”—that, by contrast, is the beautiful way in which the *Second Letter to Timothy* (1:7) describes the fundamental attitude of the Christian” (*Spe salvi*, 9)

“At the foot of the Cross, on the strength of Jesus's own word, you (Mary) became the mother of believers. In this faith, which even in the darkness of Holy Saturday bore the certitude of hope, you made your way towards Easter morning. The joy of the Resurrection touched your heart and united you in a new way to the disciples, destined to become the family of Jesus through faith. In this way you were in the midst of the community of believers, who in the days following the Ascension prayed with one voice for the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Acts* 1:14) and then received that gift on the day of Pentecost. The “Kingdom” of Jesus was not as might have been imagined. It began in that hour, and of this “Kingdom” there will be no end. Thus you remain in the midst of the disciples as their Mother, as the Mother of hope. Holy Mary, Mother of God, our Mother, teach us to believe, to hope, to love with you. Show us the way to his Kingdom! Star of the Sea, shine upon us and guide us on our way! (*Spe salvi*, 50)

**REFLECTION NOTES:**

Note your personal insights, questions, comments on these passages from *Spe salvi*

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**Invite** members of the group to share their personal insights and reflections on the **Summary of Themes** and the passage from *Spe salvi*. (20 minutes).

Group leader ensures that each person in the group has the opportunity to share, even briefly

**Break** if time permits (5 minutes)

**DISCUSSION:**

**Reflect on** the following **Discussion Questions** found in this Study Guide based on the themes of *Spe salvi*. (15 minutes)

1. Share how this study of *Spe salvi* has helped to prepare you to hear the Pope's message of hope?
2. How will you share the papal message of hope with someone in need?
3. How has this study of *Spe salvi* helped to foster unity in your parish community? In what way has this faith sharing experience connected you to your parish and to the Archdiocese of Washington?

**Discussion**, whether in large or small groups, is an effective element of adult faith formation and serves to bridge faith and life, and connect the message of Christian hope to ordinary, daily experiences and to contemporary culture.

**CONCLUSION:**

Pastor or group leader briefly **summarizes** the main points that emerged from the group discussion for this session. (10 mins)

**Conclude** these study sessions with a **prayer, hymn, or scripture reading: Psalm 27**

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**Author: Jem Sullivan, Ph.D.** is a professor in the Pontifical Faculty of the Immaculate Conception at the Dominican House of Studies, Washington, D.C., where she teaches courses on Catholic Education and the Documents of Vatican II. As a catechetical consultant she designs catechetical resources and writes for a variety of Catholic publications. Her most recent work is a Study Guide to the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults from Our Sunday Visitor.