



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 81st 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*

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**

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.