

Advent, more than any other

is a season of hope.

And hope is in short supply these days.

Perhaps that's one reason we don't usually

celebrate Advent well.

We can't wait.

Because we don't have hope.

Even our earthly hopes

are not like they were

The American Dream: can this generation expect to enjoy a better standard of living than their parents?

Retirement: did I put aside enough resources?

Wall Street: is my career what I had hoped and planned for?

Benedict XVI has given us a great gift this Advent – an encyclical (letter) on hope: *Spe Salvi* – “in hope we are saved.”

It is addressed, not to the whole world,

**but to “bishops, priests and deacons,
men and women religious,
and all the lay faithful”**

because it uses the language of faith and hope, of which the world knows little.

For a long time “faith” has equaled “faith in technological progress.”

One theologian, notes the pope, has remarked that “Progress seen accurately, is progress

from the slingshot to the atomic bomb.”

This not an overly critical rejection of unbridled

hope in scientific progress

which has been the true repository

of secular faith since the Enlightenment.

We surely can't have earthly hopes,

if we don't have BIG hope

eschatological hope

hope for later,

hope that we're saved

hope that there's an eternity

with God in heaven.

Eternal life? The pope asks.

Do we really want this?

Many people do not find the idea of living eternally attractive.

“What they want is not eternal life, but this present life,

for which faith in eternal life seems more like curse than blessing – monotonous and unbearable.”

Think of how bored some of us become with summer vacation;

imagine an eternal one! Mom and Dad..?!

So what eternal life will be like
we do not know – but it's not this life forever.
we only have hints about what it's like

at Eucharist, at prayer

Surely eternity includes both mercy and
justice

And the pope articulates a modern
understanding of heaven, purgatory and hell.

Hope for things here is important

hope for a fulfilling love

a successful career, profession

even a happy Christmas

But the most important hope for a Christian
is that “whatever the future holds,
our lives do not end in emptiness.”

Hope in the example of the saints

and the martyrs, and those striving

to become saints

“in order that we may prefer

goodness to comfort,

even in the little choices

we make each day.”

Trustworthy hope

in the saving power of Christ

in the ultimate triumph of God's
justice

enables us “to face the present,

even if arduous

when it leads to that goal

if we can be sure of this goal

and if this goal is great enough
to justify the effort of the journey.”

This is the hope

that ignites our Advent wreath

that brings light to our darkness

even if it's sometimes just a flicker.

It's still present

and can never be extinguished.

Read the pope's encyclical.

Skip over parts you might find

too philosophical

but don't skip straight to the end...

on nearly every page there are

little jewels of reflection

for Advent.

We have other helps at the door of the church as
you leave today:

The “Little Blue Books” which are popular,
but frankly, can be “Advent Lite.” If you take a
Blue Book, read the encyclical too.

The Magnificat – Advent daily prayer

Spe Salvi – read a section or two daily. It's
online at the US Bishops' and the Vatican's
websites and on EWTN's website. Or simply
Google “Benedict,” “encyclical.”

Light an Advent candle at dinner.

Light the world with hope this Advent!