**JOYFUL IN HOPE**

The oldest fragment of human writing in existence is inscribed on a clay

 tablet in a museum at Istanbul. It begins like this: “Alas, things are not what they used to be!”

It looks as though human beings have always tended to hang their hopes and enjoyments on the past. The best times and the finest things seem to belong to days gone by and never to return. Jeremiah' s words in today’s first reading are appropriate for such a person: "If good comes, he has no eyes for it” (Jer 17:5-8).

But there have always been others who look forward, who are inspired by what is and what can be, rather than by what has been and what is irretrievable. Provided they understand the past and build constructively on it, these forward-looking people do well. They do better if they recognize the spirit that moves them, the Holy Spirit who is the source of every fresh creative impulse.

We Christians have a lot to offer creative people, even when they are inspired by only some vague hope, and they should find themselves completely at home among us and in the Church, because Christians hold the key to the past, and the present, and the future that creative people are forever searching for. More than that: we recognize the Spirit of Jesus at work in the world, and we enjoy his company.

Genuine Christians look forward. with joyful hope to the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ, for whatever kingdom, power, and glory there are is his, now and forever. He who lived among us for a brief time is still with us and we look forward, with joyful hope to what he will be. We place all our hope in the promises of him who was, and is, and is to come.

Even before Jesus set out for his supreme sacrifice on Calvary, he gave us the grounds for our hope. He said.: "Do not let your hearts be troubled.. Trust in God still, and trust in me.

... I am going now to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepared. you a place, I shall return to take you with me, so that where I am, you may be too" (Jn 14:3f).

So our hope is solidly based on the past, that Jesus sacrificed himself for us, on the present, that he rose from death and lives among us, and on the future that he will come again in glory to claim us as his own. It is this last promise that keeps our Christian hope alive. We are recognized as people of joyful hope. We look forward hopefully to what has been promised, because we have faith in the person who promised us.

 St Paul reaffirms our faith and hope, in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:12ff),

"Christ raised from the dead is what has been preached. If our hope in Christ has been for this life only, we are the most unfortunate of all people. But Christ has in fact been raised from the dead, the first‑fruits of all who have fallen asleep."

St Paul says there's no comparison between our momentary troubles, or even our long drawn‑out afflictions, and the glory that these troubles produce in us. This reminds us that the afflictions of Jesus and his death produced his risen splendour, and it will be the same with us. The glory of the risen Christ is closing in on us and on God's creation.

Contemporary people, no different from the man who wrote the oldest existing clay tablet, are deeply distressed about the quality of human life and the world they live in. But instead of being productive distress that forms the splendour of the risen Christ in them, their distress is too often despair, more often cynical, helpless, and hopeless in the face of universal pollution and corruption.

We Christians, in the same world and faced with the same conditions, wait patiently and confidently, with joyful hope, for the coming of the Lord of the universe to lift man's curse, cut away his corruptions, dispel his pollutions, incinerate his blasphemies, and develop all our positive and constructive efforts, verify our faith, fulfil our hope and make all things new.

We know from the truth revealed in Scripture that Jesus Christ will return in great glory, obvious to all, the Lord of the Universe, to claim his own well-tried people and the things that we have sanctified, and to present them to his Father as members of his own Body.

But our neighbours may well wonder what effect this belief has on our lives. The unselfish people of the world, the dedicated people, the creative people, young people looking for a meaning in life: do they see that we live joyfully in the hope of this momentous event? Do they notice that it spurs us on to greater efforts of love for our Saviour and for people outside our own circle, like them?

We often find that they share a joyful hope and enthusiasm of their own, stemming from causes that they have dedicated themselves to, often non‑Christian, even anti‑Christian, which too often reveal the stark deficiency of genuine joy and hope in Christians themselves. We Christians must understand and show in practice that the whole trend of creation is towards the return of Jesus Christ who is the Lord of the universe. Then we shall see history as a continual unfolding of victories from the very beginning till now. So it will continue till the Lord comes. Then we shall be overjoyed at the place that the Lord has assigned to us in promoting his glory. Why do so many Christians slink along under cover, out of sight, little people, pious perhaps and reputed to be pillars of the Church, but with huge timidity, when the whole world, time and all eternity belong to them?

Christianity, centred on the desire to promote God's glory everywhere, in every creature, spread over the entire universe, begets the hope of victory and the joy of conquerors. Not the enthusiasm of rioters, bomb‑throwers or suicide bombers, but the joy and confidence of Jesus Christ himself who has overcome the world. Joyful, hopeful Christians beget peace as well as zeal in those who love God, and attract those countless others who are searching for the goal of their creative, dedicated and unselfish efforts.