

“Hope” is the thing with feathers

(Emily Dickinson)

“Hope” is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I’ve heard it in the chilliest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.

Mystical Hope (Richard Rohr)

Hope is the main impulse of life. —Ilia Delio, OSF.

Because we are so quickly led to despair, most of us cannot endure suffering for long without some sliver of hope or meaning. However, it is worth asking ourselves about where our hope lies. My friend and colleague Cynthia Bourgeault makes a powerful distinction between what she calls ordinary hope, “tied to outcome . . . an optimistic feeling . . . because we sense that things will get better in the future” and mystical hope “that is a complete reversal of our usual way of looking at things. Beneath the ‘upbeat’ kind of hope that parts the seas and pulls rabbits out of hats, this other hope weaves its way as a quiet, even ironic counterpoint.” She writes,

We might make the following observations about this other kind of hope, which we will call *mystical hope*. In contrast to our usual notions of hope:

1. Mystical hope is not tied to a good outcome, to the future. It lives a life of its own, seemingly without reference to external circumstances and conditions.
2. It has something to do with *presence*—not a future good outcome, but the immediate experience of being met, held in communion, by something intimately at hand.
3. It bears fruit within us at the psychological level in the sensations of strength, joy, and satisfaction: an “unbearable lightness of being.” But mysteriously, rather than deriving these gifts from outward expectations being met, it seems to produce them from within.

[It] is all too easy to understate and miss that hope is not intended to be an extraordinary infusion, *but an abiding state of being*. We lose sight of the invitation—and in fact, our *responsibility*, as stewards of creation—to develop a conscious and permanent connection to this wellspring. We miss the call to become a vessel, to become a chalice into which this divine energy can pour; a lamp through which it can shine. . . .

We ourselves are not the *source* of that hope; we do not manufacture it. But the source dwells deeply within us and flows to us with an unstinting abundance, so much so that in fact it might be more accurate to say we dwell within it. . . .

The good news is that this deeper current does exist and you actually *can* find it. . . . For me the journey to the source of hope is ultimately a *theological* journey: up and over the mountain to the sources of hope in the headwaters of the Christian Mystery. This journey to the wellsprings of hope is not something that will change your life in the short range, in the externals. Rather, it is something that will change your innermost way of seeing. From there, inevitably, the externals will rearrange. . . .

The journey to the wellsprings of hope is really a journey toward the centre, toward the innermost ground of our being where we meet and are met by God.



SOLITUDE

Solitude, a simple den,
A piece of paper and a pen,
A cup of tea, a piece of toast.
A window and the holy ghost.
Some calm, a table and a chair;
The mind is free, the soul is bare,
There's love to make and life to hold.
The ancient tiny thread of gold
That runs through all the joy and gloom
Is found inside this little room.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Elaine