

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"Hope: Not just wishful thinking"



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What are the things for which you hope? World peace? A promotion at work? The lottery jackpot? Good health? A secure retirement? An end to violence? A cure for cancer?

What do we do when we hope? What does it really mean when we hope for something?

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines hope as "to wish for something with the expectation of fulfillment." It defines the theological virtue of hope as "the desire and search for a future good, difficult, but not impossible, to attain with God's help."

From a theological point of view, there is much more to hope than mere wishful thinking.

In the opinion of St. Francis de Sales, we cannot fully understand the virtue of *hope* without also understanding the practice of *aspiration*.

In Book Two of his Treatise on the Love of God, Francis de Sales distinguishes one from the other: "We hope for those things that we expect to gain through the aid of another, whereas we aspire to those things that we expect to gain through our own resources and our own efforts." (Chapter 17)

Put a different way, we hope when we rely on others' efforts

for good things, whereas we aspire when we rely on our own efforts.

A simple example might be helpful to understand the relationship between hope and aspiration, and how we need to practice both in order to attain the good things for which we desire.

My sister has a son in first grade. She desires (as would any parent) that each and every day of school is a safe, healthy and positive experience for him. She *aspires* when she wakes him up in the morning; she *aspires* when she helps him to get dressed; she *aspires* when she makes him breakfast; she *aspires* when she checks his backpack; she *aspires* when she walks him to the bus stop; she *aspires* when she gives him a kiss and watches him board the bus; she *aspires* as she waves goodbye.

As the bus pulls away, my sister *hopes*: she *hopes* that the driver completes the trip safely; she *hopes* that her son's teachers will do their very best; she *hopes* that her son's classmates will treat him with kindness and respect; she *hopes* that her son does the same for others; she *hopes* that the return bus trip will be as safe as the morning's; she *hopes* that her son remembers to bring home what he needs to prepare

for tomorrow.

She *aspires* when she is there to greet the bus; she *aspires* as she walks him home; she *aspires* as she listens to him talk about all the wonderful things that happened that day in school. She *aspires* as she cares for him during what remains of this day; she *hopes* for another good day tomorrow.

Of the relationship between these two practices, Francis wrote: "Just as those who would try to hope without aspiring are cowardly and irresponsible, so too, those who try to aspire without hoping are rash, insolent and presumptuous." (*Ibid*)

As people of faith, we *hope* when we know that the good things for which we wish depend on the grace of God and the good will of others. As people of faith, we *aspire* when we recognize that the good things for which we wish also depend on our own efforts.

As people of faith, wisdom consists of knowing when and how to hope; when and how to aspire. Wish to win the lottery? Be sure to buy a ticket! Wish for a secure retirement? Be sure to plan now! Wish for good health? Be sure to see a doctor regularly! Wish for world peace? Be sure to begin at home.