

laudabimus: ecce quod erit in fine, sine fine (We will sit there and we will see; we will see and we will love we will love and we will praise: behold what will be in the end, without end) (S. Aug., De Civ. Dei lib. XXII, 30).

The cited texts of Father Etchecopar make it very clear to us that the virtue of hope is a spirit with which the disciples of Jesus can face all the realities of life, the good times and the bad times, with the certainty of the promise of happiness. that the gospel beatitudes promise. This happiness is the end to which our life is oriented and which doesn't allows us to settle for any human experience. It is the mood that emerges from following Jesus, who with his pierced Heart, pleases the Father, doing his will, without stopping to please himself in anything. Each event and each joyful or painful encounter makes us mature, grow in that ambition that the Father had when creating us. Always responding to this founding project, we also please the Father by doing his will and we always go forward (En avant toujours). We go, like Jesus, through the world doing good and enduring evil with fidelity to the love that he has shown us, attracted by the share that he already gave us in his Resurrection, from the day of our Baptism.



*Father Etchecopar,
a man of hope*

Fr. Gaspar Fernández Pérez scj

1. The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines hope as follows: Hope is the theological virtue through which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, putting our trust in the promise of Christ and relying not on our strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit (Cat. I. Cat.1817). In the next article no. 1818, it describes the effects of hope in these terms:

The virtue of hope responds to the aspiration to happiness, which God has placed in the heart of every man; it assumes the desires that inspire the activities of men; it purifies them to direct them to the kingdom of heaven; protects against discouragement; supports us in times of desolation; and quickens the heart in expectation of eternal bliss. The momentum of hope protects us from selfishness and leads to the joy of charity. (Cat. I. Cat. 1818) (CCC n. 1818)

2. Following these definitions, I was reading the Circular Letters of Fr. Auguste Etchecopar and I found these traits of hope in Fr. Auguste: in the letters that speak of the experience of persecution that the Church of France was going through at that time; in the obituaries that he

wrote of the religious who were dying; in the desire to keep alive the charism of Fr Garicoits in that historical moment and in the future.

3. He writes to the Fathers and brothers of America, taking a real interest in all that they are doing during school holidays. He is anxious to know that everything contributes to the good of all religious and to the great praise of the Virgin Mary. He informs them about the threat that the revolution poses to France, but always with that open attitude that expresses so well the 'Forward, forward!' And trusting in the protection of the Virgin Mary:

I wish you a good end to the holidays and a good start to the school year, for the greater glory of our most holy Heavenly Mother, to whom we owe so much!

The revolution threatens us more and more in France... Sed si Maria Virgo pro nobis, quis contra nos? (But if the virgin Mary is for us, who can be against us?) Forward! Forward!

I look forward to news of retreats, ordinations, vacations, everything that will have contributed to renewing our beloved children... Sint sani scitis, sancti! Ad majorem Virginis gloriam! (May you be healthy and holy! For the greater glory of the Virgin!)

(To the Fathers and Brothers of America, January 3, 1880)

4. Fidelity to the commitments of daily life, in the midst of "the present moment", fills the heart of Fr. Auguste with happiness and deep peace for all religious. It is a precious grace, which is granted to them for living in charity and in a union of hearts. All of this is proof that God is with them:

My heart is filled with joy. In the midst of the anguish of the present hour, may deepest peace guard your minds and your hearts; just work at your post, without concern for tomorrow, trustingly relying on the goodness of the Heavenly Father and the vigilance of your superiors.

He expressed, and in almost the same terms, the feelings which animated on the threshold of eternity one of our most venerable apostles, Father Fondeville.

O signal grace! O peace! O prodigious confidence! Yes, most certainly, you are the fulfillment of the most merciful and formal promises of the Heart of Jesus!

Oh ! happy through the goodness of God! and a thousand times happy, in spite of its smallness, our Congregation, where youth meets with the most holy old men to live, suffer and die in all assurance in the Most Holy, Most Loving and Most Loving Heart of Jesus.

Happy, a thousand times happy, all of us, my Fathers and my Brothers, if, called to the same divine tenderness, we deserve them by the same humble and constant fidelity!

(Circular letter, Betharram, 30/11/1895)

14. In the last Circular Letter written in Betharram on 11/1/1896, Fr. Etchecopar communicates to all the religious the Acts of the Chapter that has just been celebrated. He informs them of other jobs that are pending for the positions of Directors of Studies and Discipline of the schools And he asks for their prayers for Fr. Lullier, who has been appointed visitor of the communities of America, for the good progress of the process of the "Founder and Father" and ends the letter with a great act of Christian hope in the happiness of Heaven:

To this end, and to speed to Heaven, (which the Octave of All Saints holds before us), let us add to our prayers works worthy of our profession and a life worthy of Heaven.

Let us carefully consider the bliss of our Brethren who, from here, have ascended into glory. May this thought excite us, inflame us; let us walk in their footsteps, and, like them, by the same fidelity, after having shared their battles, we will share their crown, and the blessed hour will come, when, with them, we will taste eternal rest, we will see God, we will love God, we will praise God: a happy end that will have no end! Ibi vacabimus and videbimus; videbimus and amabimus; amabimus and

and ever new trials, the source of immense consolation and the principle of indomitable courage, for you must say to yourselves: Thus did our Fathers, sow in tears for a prodigious harvest; thus you must follow them, fertilize your furrow, come what may, in the hope of a reward that God has kept secret, but which will come in its time. And you will be able to see that by this noble disinterestedness, you will carry out the wish of our founder; you will appear to be, and you will be in fact, his true and legitimate children: humble and devoted...humble, always humble in the heart; in the midst of success, saying in the spirit of truth, in the presence of truth itself: servi inutiles sumus ; we are only useless servants. And if success eludes your efforts, it makes you doubly humble, but never defeated, never defeated: he alone is our foundation, he alone is the ground of our being. A soul may be dominated by the thoughts of the earth, but not a soul which dominates the whole earth by the thought of heaven, and by the life in heaven: conversatio nostra in Coelis est. Our dialogue is in heaven.

(To the Fathers and Brothers of America, Bethlehem, 12/12/1892).

13. In another letter, Fr. Etchecopar, writing the obituary of the young Fr. François Lacrouts who died at the age of 30, proposes to edify all the religious of the Congregation “with the account of his virtues”. We put our focus on what he says about hope in the fulfillment of the promises of happiness made to the disciples of Jesus, who live, suffer and die like him. To that happiness we are called by the same tenderness of God:

Detached from himself so perfectly, he (Fr Lacruts) made, without hesitation, the sacrifice of life to his God, and accepted, as soon as they were offered to him, the last sacraments: “I can die today or tomorrow; I have no illusions in this regard; and yet I feel so peaceful that I fear a trap of the devil underneath.”

This disposition is a very precious grace. First of all, simply from the point of view of human wisdom, nothing contributes to the salvation of a ship battered by a storm so much as calm and harmony in following orders under a unified command couple with prompt obedience.

Then nothing attracts help from on high more than charity and the union of minds and hearts. And if God is for us, he will turn all things to our greatest good.

(To the Fathers and Brothers of America, -/June/1880)

5. Fr. Etchecopar reports with all the details of the persecution that some congregations have already experienced (the Fathers of the Sacred Heart of Toulouse, the Lourdes Fathers) and also the Cardinal Archbishop of Toulouse. In this atmosphere of persecution, the communities of Betharram are safe, although they are afraid, due to the rumours that spread through the region, also proclaiming the intervention of Betharram.

It has been said that they were afraid of outraging public opinion too much by attacking us. That is possible. But in any case, we receive from our divine Patroness, the greatest favour ... We are still here with heads held high, ready to sanctify ourselves and to sanctify souls, ready to anticipate the new trials which threaten religion and to prepare.

(To the Fathers and Brothers of America, Betharram, 18/11/1880)

6. In the same letter, Fr. Etchecopar goes into the details of the analysis of the situation: The two Houses (of Parliament) have entrusted the Government to implement the most discriminatory laws that seek to annul the rights of religious, limit the action of the Bishops and undermine the constitution of the Church. This is a very well thought out strategy to destroy ecclesial life. Fr. Etchecopar ends his narrative

in calling for the help of the Lord and faithfulness to the demands posed by pastoral reality, with these words of hope:

*May the Lord help us!... May he have mercy on us! Let us redouble our humility, zeal and devotion to his service. The days are evil: hallow both ourselves and others in fear and trembling. They (the authorities) spy on our every step: we have already been slandered twice before the bishop in a very short time. Pray for us, dear Fathers and Brothers!
(To the Fathers and Brothers of America, Betharram, 18/11/1880)*

7. Faced with the realization that other Institutes have been persecuted and that we remain intact without being able to understand why, Fr. Etchecopar invites the Betharamite religious to be hope-in-action embracing responsibility for pastoral duties (which others have been forbidden to undertake) for the good of souls.

*Let us enter, dear Fathers and Brothers, let us enter ever further into this divine Heart where we find: salvation, consolations and glory. (St Bernard).
Salvation for all our sins.
Consolations in all our troubles.
Eternal glory, as a reward.
Let us enter into this ever open Heart, opened by us, opened for us, we who are specially charged with discovering its treasures in the world, by our words, and above all by our example.
For us, who have this duty, especially now that we have been preserved as if by a miracle and for some time at least, in the midst of so many destroyed (apostolic) Institutes, preserved, I say, in order to replace them as best as possible, in order to practice, in their absence, those religious virtues of which they gave such admirable examples....
[...]
Oh ! this is, for us, a very great duty!
Why do we stand among so many piles of ruins?*

condecorari mandavit. (He ordered that he be honoured by a Decree of highest praise).

*Now for the Constitutions, in which are indicated the goal of the Founder, the vows and the virtues characterising his work; a luminous trail marking the way, an abundant and ever open source of life and devotion.
Analysed in the crucible of a long and severe examination, they have just been approved; the Pope, Doctor and Universal Pastor, in the exercise of his sacred Magisterium, has himself pronounced on their goodness and their excellence; and investing each of its articles and the whole of its sovereign authority and sanction, on the one hand, it recommends them to the world as a religious Code worthy of being embraced, and on the other hand, it gives them to us to ourselves as a sure way to advance in the perfection of our state.
What glory for our Father! What glory also for his children! on condition, however, of following in his footsteps and, like him, through the Cross, achieving triumph.
(Circular Letter; Bétharram, 15/15/1890, Approval of the Constitutions).*

12. Fr. Etchecopar makes a great call to hope to the Fathers and Brothers of America. They are disciples of Jesus and like him, they have to go through humility, work and suffering. These characteristics are basic to the work of the Founder. This must be experienced in the trials that will never be lacking. Thus they should be self-effacing and give themselves devotedly so they they find what they seek. For this, you do not have to be oriented by the desires of this world, but by those of Heaven.

Yes, my friends, children of the Crib, of Nazareth and of Calvary, doubly marked with the sign of Our Lord Jesus Christ with the seal of Betharram, with the seal of the colony and of San José, you will always have to walk a narrow path of humility, of work, of suffering: this is your heritage, this is your glory and that of the congregation; it must also be for you, in the ever recurring

devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, source of infinite treasure. And in these evil days, when Hell attacks us with fury, let us keep our eyes raised towards our dear Calvary, and do not let go for a moment of the Blessed Branch that our Mother holds out to us; yes, our Mother; our All, after her Divine Son: for all that is honest, lovable, luminous, generous, pure in you, from whom do you receive it, if not from the Most Blessed Virgin, Our Lady of Betharram?

(Circular Letter to the houses of France, Betharram, 1/3/1885)

Why, for a few months, perhaps longer, will it be given to us to taste in our various houses, and especially in the Motherhouse, the joys of community life, which are truly a foretaste of the delights of paradise?

Why! if not to offer to God, (in the absence of so many expelled holy victims), the holocaust of chastity, poverty, obedience, which are so dear to him, if not to offer him worship par excellence, which is perfect christianity religio nihil aliud quam holocaustum. (Christian religion is nothing less than a burnt offering.) St Thomas

(To the Fathers and Brothers of America, Betharram, 18/12/1880)

11. In another letter, Fr. Etchecopar presents Fr. Garicoits to us as a genuine witness of hope. He reveals to us the paschal condition of Fr. Garicoits, a disciple of the risen Jesus, following his fate both on the cross and in glory. For this, Fr. Etchecopar glosses the words of Jesus to the pilgrims of Emmaus: "Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer in order to enter into his glory?" (Luke 24.26) It deals with the complicated situation of Fr. Garicoits at the end of his life: Michael maintains a heroic obedience to the Bishop of Bayonne, running the risk of the dissolution of the Congregation, but trusting that if it was the work of the Sacred Heart and not his, it would survive.

How he must have suffered, especially at those times when, resembling the pathway of the Lord to the end, he saw the very existence of his project threatened, and when all seemed lost on the side of earth and heaven!

Then above all, with eyes and heart fixed on the Cross, invincible in his faith and his hope, he answered all the would-be sceptics saying: "The Congregation is the work of God; he founded it; he will preserve it and advance it in his service and his love".

Was he mistaken? And hasn't Heaven taken on the task of responding and glorifying this great lover of the Cross? Et ita intrare in gloriam suam. (And so to enter into his glory) What is this glory? In my eyes, it is first of all the renown of his holiness, the noise and the clamour around his tomb; then, the triple consecration of his Institute, coming from the Sovereign Pontiffs, and containing the highest praise: Amplissimae laudis Decreto

8. Fr. Etchecopar has a very positive view of the communities in France, after the visit that Fr. Pierre Barbé has just made. In this optimistic tone, Fr. Etchecopar asks the Superiors of the communities to keep that spirit alive in the weekly conferences so as not to stray from the Founder's path and so reach the goal of our vocation and that of the Institute. Fr. Etchecopar ends with a comment on a quote from a letter from Fr. Garicoits dated October 31, 1861:

"The way to found, to revivify, to lead the apostolate, is to be and to show oneself 'a perfect auxiliary of the obedient Jesus Christ'. Insist on it, he added, (insta in illis). May everyone be (and always show themselves to be) "perfect helpers"- never embarrassments or obstacles- for the Sacred Heart of Jesus and for their Superiors!!! May God give you this grace! "

(Circular Letter to the Houses of France, Pau, 1/3/1886)

Following the quotation from the letter, Fr. Etchecopar makes the following hopeful comment. It is a hope with straight talking, energetic, active and combative against the liberal mentality of society. Hope is expressed very well in the motto of Fr. Garicoits, Here I am, Forward!:

¹Nella Corrispondenza di San Michele Garicoits non troviamo questa lettera con questa data.

*What depth and what form! What energy and what precision!
 What a feeling and what an accent in these underlined words, in
 these three exclamation marks!!
 Ah! this good Father could not forget the tears he had seen flow
 from the eyes of several Bishops, dispirited by the spirit of
 independence and criticism, alas! so widespread, even among the
 Clergy.
 So vowing a fight to the finish against this judgmental, mocking,
 disobedient, sulky liberalism, etc., etc., with which even good
 people themselves are infected, he devoted his whole life to
 forming a Society comprising only people humble and dedicated,
 with the motto: Here I am! Forward!
 Oh ! let us walk, my Fathers and my Brothers, let us walk in such
 luminous, glorious footsteps! And may the Heart of Jesus grant
 us the grace to become for others his perfect helpers for the
 greatest honour of his Divine Mother, ad majorem Mariae
 gloriam.(To the greater glory of Mary).
 Let us implore this immense favour during this month of March
 through the intercession of the very glorious Saint Joseph.
 (Circular Letter to the Houses of France, Pau, 1/3/1886)*

9. The Circular Letter of Bth. 5/30/1887 is the obituary of Fr. Eugène Buzy, who has just died. He praises him as a faithful religious and gives us an important reflection on Christian hope. The hope that trusts in the promises of the Lord, in whom we will rest in peace. That will be the reward for having lived united to Jesus and Mary and persevering in our vocation throughout our lives.

*Whence comes, my Fathers and my Brothers, this peace, this
 serenity in the face of death, in the face of eternity, which we
 notice with such consoling and ever new surprise in those of our
 Brothers who precede us in the falls ? Obviously from the
 singular hope attached to our vocation by the promises of God,
 the special graces of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and the
 predilection love of the Most Blessed Virgin: Quoniam tu Domine
 singulariter in spe constituisti me.*

*What should a fervent religious of the Sacred Heart and of Our
 Lady of Calvary not hope for, faithful to all his duties,
 persevering in his vocation until death?
 [...] Is it any wonder that his soul, leaving the body, in this surge
 of faith, hope and charity, left on the forehead and on all the
 features of the face the seal of peace, and imprinted on it the pure
 and suave calm of a child's face resting in its mother's arms? In
 pace...etc. Here, here, my Fathers and Brothers, for us too, a
 great reason for hope! Haec maxima fiducia mea, haec tota ratio
 spei meae! And we too, one day, sustained by the same grace,
 experiencing the truth of the heavenly promises, we will fall
 asleep in peace in the arms of the same hopes.
 Oh ! How sweet it will be for us to exhale our soul on the bosom
 of the Saviour, on the heart of our good Mother! But this can only
 be on the condition of remaining devoted to them during life, and
 of persevering until death in the signal grace of our vocation!
 (Bétharram, 30/5/1887)*

10. Fr. Etchecopar always expresses hope in the midst of trying situations. In all the communities and in all the missions there are difficulties. Faced with these situations, Fr. Etchecopar says that one must give oneself more by doing the greatest possible good, then keep silent and wait for God's salvation. All this with our eyes fixed on the mystery of the Passion of Christ, Calvary and the saving Bouquet that the Virgin holds out to us.

*We do not lack challenges: everywhere, at the Mother House, in
 the Residences, in the work of the Missions and in teaching, there
 are many gaps to fill, for lack of sufficient personnel. Let us try to
 make up for it by minimising any shortcomings, by helping each
 other; by 'multiplying ourselves', by going where the general
 good calls us. That done, let us be silent and wait in peace for
 God's time.
 However, apply yourself, I pray you, with all your strength, to
 grow in piety which is useful for everything: Pietas ad omnia
 utilis est (Piety is helpful in all things) (1 Tim 4.8) and in*