

## Study Guide for *Spe Salvi*

### **What is the Magisterium?**

The living, teaching office of the Church, whose task it is to give an authentic interpretation of the word of God, whether in its written form (Sacred Scripture), or in the form of Tradition. The Magisterium ensures the Church's fidelity to the teaching of the Apostles in matters of faith and morals. (CCC Glossary)

### **Where do encyclicals get their titles?**

The title of an encyclical is always taken from the first few Latin words of the text. The text is translated into many different languages but the Latin text remains the official text.

### **Should lay persons read encyclicals?**

Although encyclicals are usually addressed to the bishops of the Church, there is no intention on the part of the Pope to restrict the readership. On the contrary, any Pope would be pleased if all members of the Church — and, indeed, all persons of good will — would be interested in reading his encyclicals. When a Pope writes an encyclical, he is hoping to bring some topic of importance to the attention of the entire Church, ultimately for the good of all. As the Vicar of Christ and the Successor of St. Peter, the Pope is the Chief Teacher of the universal Church. Catholics and those sympathetic to the Church would do well to meditate upon and to assimilate the wisdom of each encyclical.

### **Recommendations**

Ideally the entire encyclical, *Spe Salvi*, will be read and discussed. However, if a group is pressed for time — but only if it is pressed for time — it might consider skipping over Sections 6 and 7, because of their complexity. Needless to say, the encyclical is an integral work. Therefore, omission of any part of it is not recommended.

As a preparation for or as a follow-up to the encyclical, one may wish to review the sections in the Catechism that deal with the Four Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell. Although the encyclical revolves around the theological virtue of Hope and simultaneously, Faith, it could also easily be thought of as an encyclical about the Four Last Things.

### **Summary**

Pope Benedict XVI first traces the lines of the New Testament understanding of the theological virtue of Hope together with the early Church's experience of persecution and the invitation to renounce all worldly goods. He makes this distinction: that the members of the early Church saw their belief as "**performative**" rather than merely "**informative**". The belief in Christ radically altered how they lived and how they viewed death.

Pointing out that the modern world has developed a concept of Hope that is very different from that of the early Church, the Pope sketches a history of the modern world and how the Christian understanding of Hope was subtly replaced by a new understanding with a radically different focus. He cites **Francis Bacon** as an early and

influential representative of a new kind of Hope, which placed more faith in “science” and “progress” than in the Good News of eternal life as preached by the Church.

In tandem with science another form of “progress” emerged in the modern world, viz. the Hope of politics. Here “freedom” and “reason” became the great rallying cries. As man fell under the illusion that he could be independent of God by the (apparent) conquering of Nature through science, politics began to promise “heaven on earth” through change and, ultimately, through revolution.

By analyzing these trends, the Pope opens up questions about Heaven, Hell and Purgatory. In a searching fashion, he helps Christians to think more deeply about where we place our Hope and how we may have fallen short of the demands of the Gospel. Perhaps the Hope we profess is not something that truly shapes our lives. Perhaps we have been shaped more by Hope in science and politics than we have by the teachings of the Church.

In the midst of this challenging and sometimes difficult encyclical, the Pope introduces a number of heroic Christian witnesses in order to illustrate just what our true Hope is and where it lies.

The key question of the Encyclical, which is repeated like the motif of a symphony, appears in its most concrete form in article 10: “Is the Christian Faith also for us today a life-changing and life-sustaining Hope?” This is the question we are asked to answer. This is the perennial challenge of every Christian.  
“Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Lk18:8)

### **Overview of *Spe Salvi* Study Guide**

Each paragraph (or article) of the encyclical is numbered. The Study Guide has one numbered question for each paragraph and, occasionally, some sub-questions for paragraphs that warrant more than one question. The number of the Study Guide question corresponds to the paragraph with the same number. There are fifty paragraphs in the encyclical. Therefore, the Study Guide contains fifty numbered questions.

These are not the only questions one may pose. However, each question is an attempt to hone in on the central point of each paragraph. It is not necessary, nor is it expected, that each and every question will be answered. The facilitator of the discussion will be expected to guide the conversation. The Study Guide could help to keep the conversation on track.

***Section 1*** Introduction

Article 1

***Section 2*** Faith is Hope

Articles 2 and 3

***Section 3*** The concept of faith-based hope in the New Testament and the early Church

Articles 4-9

***Section 4*** Eternal life-what is it?

Articles 10-12

***Section 5*** Is Christian hope individualistic?

Articles 13-15

***Section 6*** The transformation of Christian faith-hope in the modern age

Articles 16-23

***Section 7*** The true shape of Christian hope

Articles 24-31

***Section 8*** "Settings" for learning and practicing hope

**I. Prayer as a school of hope**

Articles 32-34

**II. Action and suffering as settings for learning hope**

Articles 35-40

**III. Judgment as a setting for learning and practicing hope**

Articles 41-48

### ***Section 9 Mary, Star of Hope***

Articles 49 and 50

### ***Section 1 Introduction***

Discussion Questions:

1. What does the Pope mean when he states, “-salvation—is not simply a given”?

### ***Section 2 Faith is Hope***

2. Why and how does the Pope see an equivalency between faith and hope?

a.) Discuss the admonition from St. Paul’s Letter to the Thessalonians “you [Christians] must not ‘grieve as others do who have no hope’ (1Th 4:13)

b.) What sets Christians apart with regard to the “future”?

c.) What does the Pope mean by “performative” and “informative”?

d.) How does the Christian message combine these?

3. Read the story of **St. Josephine Bakhita** aloud.

a.) How does this dramatic story illuminate the Pope’s claim that “We who have always lived with the Christian concept of God, and have grown accustomed to it, have almost ceased to notice that we possess the hope that ensues from a real encounter with this God.”

### ***Section 3 The concept of faith-based hope in the New Testament and the early Church***

4. What was the experience of the early Christians expressed by St. Paul in his letter to Philemon and in Hebrews?

5. Drawing on a fascinating quote from **St. Gregory Nazianzen** the Pope draws a parallel between the belief in elemental spirits of the universe as believed in ancient

astrology and similar views of today “which in a different way has become fashionable once again today.”

- a.) What does he mean by this?
- b.) Can you provide some practical examples?

6. What was the role of the *authentic* philosopher in ancient times? Why did the ancient Christians see Christ as both a **Shepherd** and a **philosopher**?

7. Discuss the phrase which appears in Hebrews; “faith is the ‘substance’ of things hoped for; the proof of things not seen.” How does this relate back to the Introduction and the fundamental idea of the Encyclical?

8. What does the word *hypomone* in Hebrews illuminate about the Christian Hope and the possessions of this world?

9. In what ways do these two words highlight the theological virtue of “hope” and the failure to hope?

- a.) What are some examples of *hypomone* and *hypostole* in everyday life?

*hypomone*- patience

*hypostole*-cowardice, lack of courage

#### ***Section 4 Eternal life –what is it?***

10. **Key Question of the Encyclical-** “[I]s the Christian faith also for us today a life-changing and life sustaining hope?”

“Is it **performative** for us—is it a message which shapes our life in a new way, or is it just ‘**information**’ which, in the meantime, we have set aside and which now seems to us to have been superseded by more recent information?”

- a.) What did the old baptismal rite reveal about the purpose of baptism?
- b.) Discuss the two quotes from **St. Ambrose** at end of article 10.
- c.) What do the statements tell us about the theological meaning of death?

11. What is the “inner contradiction” Pope Benedict identifies in our attitudes about death?

12. How does this paragraph give us a deeper insight into how “eternal life” should be understood?

### ***Section 5 Is Christian hope individualistic?***

13. What harsh criticism has the modern world leveled against their perception of Christian hope?

14. What does it mean to say that “salvation” is a social reality?

15. Should monasteries be considered places “of flight from the world”? Explain.

a.) What lessons can Christians who live in the world learn from monastic life?

### ***Section 6 The transformation of Christian faith-hope in the modern age***

16. Who is **Francis Bacon** and how does the Pope see his ideas changing the nature of “hope”?

17. What is the new expectation?

18. Discuss how “reason” and “freedom” came to be seen in opposition to faith.

19. It is interesting that an allusion to the anti-christ appears in this section.

a.) Why does it appear here and in what context?

b.) What is the significance of this?

20. How did **Karl Marx** further change the understanding of “hope”?

21. What is Marx’s fundamental error?

22. Why does Pope Benedict propose a self-critique of modernity and modern Christianity?

23. What is the “perverse end” that we must be wary of?

### ***Section 7 The true shape of Christian hope***

24. What is the difference between the ethics and sciences that deal with the material world?

a.) Is changing "structures" the thing that will transform the world? Explain

b.) What can we know definitively about the kingdom of good in this world? Explain

25. What does it mean to say that "Man can never be redeemed simply from the outside."?

26. Discuss the statement, "It is not science that redeems man: man is redeemed by love."

27. What does it mean to live, as described in this paragraph?

28. On a practical and moral level what does it mean to be in "communion with Jesus"?

29. What does the example of St. Augustine's life and conversion reiterate about the themes of the Encyclical up to this point?

30. Along with Pope Benedict XVI summarize the Encyclical.

31. How are the lesser hopes of life related to the great Hope?

a.) Do we always have them in this order?

## ***Section 8 Settings for learning and practising hope***

### **I. Prayer as a school of hope**

32. These three paragraphs deserve a great deal of thought. What image of prayer emerges here?

33. How does our idea of prayer perhaps differ from that of **St. Augustine**?

34. ....or-**Nguyen Van Thuan** and Pope Benedict?

a.) -or-how do these images of prayer confirm our own experiences?

b.) What is the relationship of personal prayer to liturgical prayer?

### **II. Action and suffering as settings for learning hope**

35. How does action reveal our hopes?

- a.) What things must Christians keep in mind and heart if our actions are not to unduly tire us or turn us into fanatics?
36. What is the relation of hope and suffering?
- a.) Can Christians hope to rid the world of all suffering?
37. Discuss the letter by Vietnamese martyr **Paul Le-Bao-Tinh**.
- a.) What does his letter reveal about how a Christian soul is to be formed?
38. Why must the “yes” to love be a source of suffering?
39. Are we capable of a love that suffers?
- a.) If so, what makes this possible?
40. What does it mean “to offer something up”?
- a.) In what way does this relate to Christian hope?

### **III. Judgment as a setting for learning and practising hope**

41. How does the Pope relate our belief in the Second Coming of Christ to the virtue of hope?
42. Discuss “A world which has to create its own justice is a world without hope” against the backdrop of modern atheism.
43. How does Atheism, which is often a protest against God, fail to account for the injustices found in the world?
44. In what way are grace and justice necessarily related?
45. What do we mean by the word “**hell**”?
46. In this challenging passage reflecting on 1Cor 3:12-15 the Pope writes about how our works and lives will be judged.
- a.) Why might this console us?
  - b.) Why might this disturb us?
  - c.) How does this all relate to the essence of the theological virtue of Hope?

47. Do these two paragraphs give new insights as to the necessity and nature of **Purgatory**? How?

48. What does the Pope encourage in this paragraph and why?

a) What traditional practices of the Church can help us fulfill "the belief that love can reach into the afterlife"?

## Section 9 Mary, Star of Hope

49. What meaning does Pope Benedict pull from Mary's title of *Ave Maris stella*?

50. What final biblical exhortations does Pope Benedict leave us with? Discuss.

### Closing Exhortation

"Hope, O my soul, hope. You know neither the day nor the hour. Watch carefully, for everything passes quickly, even though your impatience makes doubtful what is certain, and turns a very short time into a long one. Dream that the more you struggle, the more you prove the love that you bear your God, and the more you will rejoice one day with your Beloved, in a happiness and rapture that can never end."

St. Teresa of Avila (*Catechism of the Catholic Church art. 1821*)

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