

## Faculty Retreat

**April 15, 2025**

**Malvern, PA**



In light of the Jubilee being celebrated throughout the Church, Fr. Monica invited me to speak with you about the theme of this year – **Hope**.

But **hope means different things** to different people.

For some, hope is **a wish** ... a desire for something we'd really like to happen though we have no control over it ... kind of like you're hoping now this will be mercifully short!

For others, hope is **an outlook** ... an expectation that things will turn out well, even if we don't know for sure that they will ... not unlike our collective hope for the Phillies once again.

But for this Jubilee Year, Pope Francis presents hope in a different light.

**For him, hope is a virtue.** In the document with which he introduces the Jubilee Year, he says it is something that **"gives inward direction and purpose to life"** (*Spes non confundit*, no. 18). Seen in that light, hope is not just something we can have, but something we should do.

In terms of renewing that life purpose during the Jubilee, the pope highlights several **"signs of hope"** that our world needs. One of those he draws attention to is **young people**.

Now, when church documents make reference to "the young," they usually have in mind people of university age. But I'd like to suggest that what the pope says about hope and youth is particularly relevant to you who work in a Catholic high school.

Interestingly, the pope describes young people as “those who are the very embodiment of hope.” I chuckled a bit when I read that and then pictured the bodies and faces that I see in class every day! But I applaud the pope’s optimism.

At the same time, he expresses concern that “without the hope that their dreams can come true, (young people) will inevitably grow discouraged and listless” and quite possibly end up living in ways that cause them more harm than good. Sadly, that listlessness and discouragement is too easily and too often something we see in them.

In either case – whether they embody hope or its opposite – the young people with whom you interact every day do embody potential and, as such, they hold out a significant opportunity for the Church. For that reason, the Holy Father issues a rather bold challenge to us all: “We must not disappoint them,” he says, “for the future depends on their enthusiasm.”

Now we have all experienced the energy and enthusiasm of youth, though perhaps you may think it is often misdirected. At times, you may even have thought to yourselves or expressed to others how “I fear for the future.”

All the more reason to take up the pope’s challenge. In his sense of hope as a virtue, his words are meant more for us who are older than for those who are young.

“We must not disappoint them.” That’s not just an optimistic wish; it’s an imperative ... a call to necessary action ... a way to make this Jubilee real and effective.

So, how can you not be disappointing to the students you encounter every day? Let me suggest three ways.

***One is to SHOW them hope ... the hope that you, yourselves, have.***

That hope comes from cultivating a personal awareness of, and appreciation for, what we celebrate in this holiest week of the year. It’s a hope by which you realize that there is so much more to life than the transitory ups and downs of each day and each school year. It’s the hope that carries us beyond the experiences that typically confound young people.

Pope Francis puts it this way: “We, however, by virtue of the hope in which we were saved, can view the passage of time with the certainty that the history of humanity and our own individual history are not doomed to a dead end or a dark abyss, but directed to an encounter with the Lord of glory. As a result, (he says) we live our lives in expectation of his return and in the hope of living forever in him.” (no. 19)

Your hope, your certainty, is what young people need to see.

***A second way not to disappoint the young is to TEACH them to hope***, specifically to set their hope on God.

Your students have an endless supply of experiences that can, as the pope says, frustrate their dreams and aspirations and seem to take away their hope. Each one offers you a teaching moment, an opportunity that can help them shape their lives.

The lesson to be taught, a lesson that hopefully each of you has already learned from your experience, is the same lesson that every saint has known and, by example, has taught – namely, that in our Christian lives, we are called not to be successful, but to be faithful ... so that we can enjoy a happiness that is eternal life.

We, ourselves, learn that lesson when we come to realize that whatever good we might do, and whatever bad we might suffer, both are far and away surpassed by the mercy of God. It’s thanks to God, not our own merits, that we can always have hope.

To the extent that you communicate that truth to your students, in and through the varying events of their young lives, you teach them how to have the kind of hope that will never disappoint them.

Besides showing them your own hope, and teaching them where to place their hope, ***the third way not to disappoint the young is simply to PRAY for them***. Lord knows, they need it! But even more so, praying for them is how you can put into action the pope’s call to have “renewed passion” for those entrusted to you and to “demonstrate care and concern” for the very ones who are “the joy and hope of the Church and of the world!”

All of this – our hope and our faith, our certainty and our prayer, our challenge and our responsibility – all of it is symbolized in the **anchor** that is part of Bishop Shanahan’s school shield.

Of that symbol, the Holy Father offers a lengthy but insightful analysis, which serves as a fitting conclusion to this little talk. As he says,

“The image of the anchor is eloquent; it helps us to recognize the stability and security that is ours amid the troubled waters of this life, provided we entrust ourselves to the Lord Jesus. The storms that buffet us will never prevail, for we are firmly anchored in the hope born of grace, which enables us to live in Christ and to overcome sin, fear and death. (And he concludes) This hope, which transcends life’s fleeting pleasures and the achievement of our immediate goals, makes us rise above our trials and difficulties, and inspires us to keep pressing forward, never losing sight of the grandeur of the heavenly goal to which we have been called.” (no. 25)

In your own lives, and in your work as educators, may that hope always be yours and, through you, may it be your students’ hope, too.

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## **HOMILY** for Tuesday of Holy Week

As the end draws near, it's understandable that Jesus is "deeply troubled." He knows what's coming to him – but he has known it all along.

Perhaps what is more troubling is what is happening around him. Judas and Peter – how very disappointing those two are. They were chosen to be Apostles, two of the "top 12" in the coming of the Kingdom. Yet one will betray Jesus, the other deny even knowing him.

Still, the Lord knows ... and chooses anyhow to die for both of them. Indeed, for all who follow Him, Jesus will go ... and will take upon himself the frustrations and failures of this world, the disappointments and despair we experience, the sorrows we feel and the sins we commit ... He will go to Calvary and by His sacrifice on the Cross, He will transform it all into glory.

So, what of those two disappointing disciples? Is there any hope for them? The Good News is "yes"—provided they stay with the Lord. As we know, Peter does, while Judas does not.

Unlike Judas, Peter held fast to the virtue of hope. Staying with the very Lord whom he momentarily denied knowing, he comes to learn what Isaiah meant in the prophecy we heard in the first reading: that even "though (he) thought (he) had toiled in vain, and for nothing, uselessly, spent (his) strength" – even though, that is, he had every reason to lose all hope, "yet (his) reward is with the Lord."

And that's Good News for us ... especially when we have those days where we think our toil with and for young people is in vain and useless. For as long as we remain with the Lord, as we do here, our hope will never be disappointed. And with that hope we have, we can once again show and teach and pray for the young people entrusted to our care.

For that opportunity, for that challenge, for that grace that we have been given, let us give thanks and praise to the Lord – who is and always will be the foundation to the hope we have in this life and for eternal happiness.

+ May God Be Blessed +