

How to find hope in the midst of a pandemic?

Is this the end of the world, I asked myself.

And I thought: Never!

What we are living through for over a year now is not the end of the world.

Finding hope in the midst of a pandemic – is the theme I gave myself for this meditation.

There are so many voices in these strange times... too many. Often, we don't know what to make of it all. Often these voices frighten us, distract and paralyse us. We don't know anymore, what to think, what to believe and how to live.

Sometimes it seems clever to be pessimistic.

Optimists are regarded as naïve...

But somewhere in between, we have got to live, to cope, to make ends meet...

In an article in the German weekly magazine Der Spiegel I read that the future belongs to those who are realistic. To those who still believe that humankind is going the right way... to those who still see hope because they understand hope as work, work for us to do. Hope as a process.

Of course, these sad times of the pandemic can rob us of our hopes and visions. The world is turned upside down. Governments failed in their tasks. In many places life became unbearable. A prominent impression was and is that we are living in dark times. The photos of mass graves, the tears shed over Corona deaths, the desperation in intensive care units, the silence in the streets during lockdown and "Ausgangssperre", the loneliness of young and old are all experiences that have shaped us and will remain with us.

But what we are living through right now is NOT the end of the world!

"Health, prosperity, education, life expectancy, peace, democracy, security – everything has been developing for the better for a long time, but nobody talks about it," says the Canadian American psychologist Steven Pinker. The pandemic does not deny or destroy that. Poverty, starvation, diseases, even wars – all were worse decades ago. Human beings (scientists, philosophers, teachers, politicians, journalists, human rights activists and many more) are constantly working for the better in the lives of humankind. This is a fact. It's just that nobody tells us about it. Not the news, not the newspapers. This silence must be overcome!

We must begin to talk about hope.

At the beginning of this pandemic, my old friend and former professor and bishop Walter Klaiber, chose hope as the main theme of his first public statement to the pandemic. 1 Cor 13: 13 was his Bible text.

"And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love."

In the past, when we interpreted this text and used it, we emphasized love. Of course, we did. The past 13 months or so have taught us that, above all, it's hope that counts... Hope expected with love and in faith. How perspectives can change...

Hope is not something that falls in our lap. Hope is something we must work for. The history of humankind is full of people who helped human life to improve. This fact is not ending, just

because we are living through an awful pandemic. Great minds have shaped the good in our existence in the past; they will also do it in the future!

Hope is powerful!

In hope lies the power to carry on, to not give up. Hope does not ask us to sit and wait for it. Hope wants us active; “hope wants us to throw ourselves into what is becoming,” I read in the philosopher Ernst Bloch’s book “Principle of Hope”. Bloch also writes, “search in the world itself for what will help the world, you can find it.”

Those who created the first vaccines against Covid-19 did exactly that. A double share of courage and knowledge worked the miracle.

Within a few months the impossible was possible! Since then a new hope is in the world. Besides all organisational and political failures and mistakes, a hope has been born that does not only bring in sight an end of the pandemic, but also the human capability of shaping and saving the future.

What we need are people with knowledge, values and the sincere wish to improve the lives of all on this planet.

Could we be among those?

Us Christians?

What do we have to offer through our faith?

We realize how fragile and vulnerable we are to outbreaks of infectious diseases. None of us were prepared for this outbreak. In times like this it is normal and natural to ask where God is. But this is not a time for Christians to retreat from their faith. This is, however, a time to wait patiently for hope to spring from our life of “social distancing” and “self-isolation”. We can come to terms with our fears and difficulties in the belief that God cares for us despite of the pandemic and its effects... that God is in there with us and gives us strength to bear the trials and tribulations of life.

The suffering that came over the whole world, the enormity of pain and despair, the misery and the sense of loss are beyond words. But I want to hold fast to the perspective that we can still have faith in God.

Denying the existence of God does not diminish the problem in any way. But faith in God can give us strength to bear the suffering and bring us hope that things will change for the better. I also believe that God dwells among his people and never leaves us alone.

Our world is far from perfect. The present pandemic is a crisis delivered by nature. We must accept the simple truth that we sometimes suffer not because of our own mistakes, but because of other’s faults, too. Suffering is part and parcel of life.

This world is no heaven... but heaven begins here, when we let God’s kingdom shape and infuse our lives. Something better is always to come! We are equipped with the means to help bring it about.

Even when life is sad and dark, faith lends a light dimension to it.

Faith can make our lives worth living. It overcomes despair and depressions and brings peace. It brings us ethical values and helps us live in the storms. It asks us to love our neighbour... even if in some cases this can be only lived out spiritually.

It's God's spirit that saves us and connects us – even if we have to stay away from each other and distance ourselves physically. This spirit is not locked down. There is no night curfew for the holy spirit and the power of prayers.

Let's hold fast to God in his abundant love for humanity. And if we find it hard to find God, God will surely find us and give us hope.
Amen.