 Reading time: 4 min.

A reflection on Rom 12:12: “Be joyful in hope, steadfast in tribulation, persevering in prayer.”

Let us pause for a moment over these few words. Let us read them again slowly, allowing each to find its place within us: *joyful… steadfast… persevering*. These brief words, written by Paul to the community in Rome, encompass an entire journey. They are like compass points offered to those who fear they have lost their way.

And how many people today feel lost. We live in a time rich in possibilities, knowledge and tools, yet often poor in shared points of reference. Information, proposals and promises of happiness reach us at every hour, and we struggle to distinguish what lasts from what passes. Everything is speeding up. Uncertainty is growing, and life is becoming fragmented. And something within us is growing weaker: our ability to wait, to persevere and to trust.

Paul does not offer us a formula that comforts us for a moment. He gives us a rule for living. He does not ask us to flee the world, but to live in it with our hearts set on a course. *Hope, steadfastness, prayer*: woven together like a three-stranded cord that is not easily broken.

Joyful in hope

Be joyful in hope. The first word is an invitation to joy. Not to superficial cheerfulness, but to the quiet joy born of a certainty: God is faithful. Our lives have meaning. No situation, however dark, is ever beyond the reach of his saving hand.

Let us allow this certainty to sink deep within us. History is not a random succession of events; our lives are not consigned to emptiness. We are moving towards a fulfilment that we do not bring about on our own: we receive it as a promise and welcome it as a gift. And for this very reason, hope does not turn us away from our daily commitments. Rather, it gives them back to us so that we may undertake

them with greater freedom and responsibility.

Those who hope can sow even when they cannot yet see the harvest; love without possessing; serve without seeking a reward. Hope frees us from the anxiety of wanting ‘everything, right now’, and teaches us to wait fruitfully, patiently and trustingly: like the farmer who steadfastly awaits the precious fruit of the earth.

To be joyful in hope, then, means keeping in our hearts a joy that can endure even through tears. It is the joy of those who know that evil will not have the final word. A humble joy, sometimes silent, yet resting on a rock: the presence of God.

Steadfast in tribulation

Christian hope does not erase tribulation. It promises no one a life without trials. It asks something humbler and, at the same time, greater of us: to remain *steadfast* through the trial.

Steadfastness is the quiet strength of those who remain faithful when the road becomes steep. It means not abandoning what is good simply because it demands time, sacrifice and patience. When everything around us urges us to discard whatever brings no immediate return, believers bear witness to the value of faithfulness: in relationships, in vocation, in service, in education, and in the pursuit of justice.

Tribulation takes many forms, and each of us knows some of them. Illness. Loneliness. Failure. Misunderstandings. A crisis of faith. The struggle of accompanying someone who is suffering. And then there are the tribulations that weigh upon entire peoples: war, poverty, forced migration, violence, inequality, and a lack of confidence in the future. Faced with all this, disciples cannot look away. Indifference is not the way of the Gospel.

Steadfastness according to the Gospel becomes presence. It is the mature ability to stay beside those who suffer, without running away. It is the courage to defend a person’s dignity when no one else seems to recognize it. It is faithfulness to the Gospel even when its message seems weak, uncomfortable and at odds with prevailing trends.

Persevering in prayer

But where do hope and steadfastness come from? Not from willpower alone. They need a deeper source, which Paul names: *persevering in prayer*. Without prayer, hope risks becoming naïve optimism, and steadfastness, senseless stubbornness. In prayer, however, we gratefully acknowledge that our lives are sustained by God.

To pray is to return to the source each day. In silence and by listening to the Word, we learn to distinguish what is urgent from what truly matters. Prayer is not a magic wand that changes our circumstances. It is the sacred space in which God changes us. He transforms our outlook, enlightens our hearts and teaches us to understand history not through the lens of our fears, but in the light of his faithfulness.

To persevere in prayer means continuing even in times of dryness, distraction and silence, when no consolation comes our way. It is precisely there that prayer is purified. We choose to trust in God for who He is, and not only for what He gives.

Persevering prayer thus becomes relationship, surrender, and openness. And it does not shut us away in a private inner world. A true encounter with God always grows into a call to meet our brothers and sisters: the poor, young people who have lost their way, families who are hurting and all those who have lost hope. True prayer opens our eyes, teaches us compassion, and leads us to serve.

A compass for our time

In a world without a compass, Christians do not claim to have all the answers. They simply bear witness to having found a direction. And that direction has a face and a name: Christ, in whom suffering is suffused with love and death opens onto resurrection.

Believers do not impose their certainties arrogantly. They offer a credible witness: joyful without being naïve, steadfast without becoming rigid, prayerful without withdrawing from the world. Through their lives, they show that another way of living is possible.

Amid the disorientation of our time, Paul gives us a simple yet profound compass. Let us hold it in our hands and allow it to guide our steps: hope with joy, stand firm with love, pray without tiring.