

Letter 2025

Hoping beyond all hope

¹ In May 2024, with two of my brothers we travelled as pilgrims through war-torn Ukraine. During the summer, we welcomed in Taizé young people from Myanmar,

Nicaragua and Ukraine. In the autumn, I had online conversations with youth from these countries as well as from Bethlehem and Lebanon, as four of my brothers returned to Ukraine, visiting the country from east to west.

² "There can be no hope without the prior experience of a total absence of horizon, which is like a night in broad daylight and forces individuals as well as peoples to shed their illusions." Corine Pelluchon in *L'espérance, ou la traversée de l'impossible* (Éditions Payot & Rivages, Paris, 2023) p. 8

³ "Hope is the human response to the silence of God." Jacques Ellul, quoted by Anne Lécu www.revue-etudes.com/article/esperer/24779

Listening to young people in Taizé and elsewhere¹, many of whom are confronted with harsh realities in their everyday life, I ask myself how they find the strength to carry on. The question becomes even more pressing when they are living in war zones.

Where do their resilience and perseverance in seemingly impossible situations come from? It became clear to me, as I listened, that trust in God enables people of faith to nurture a hope. And through the Resurrection of Jesus, a certainty grows that death will not have the last word.

Trust in the Resurrection gives hope that the weariness of life is not the final point. We are called to something more. It is this hope that young people wanted to share with me, a hope that is beyond all hope because it counts on new life to arise when all seems lost².

Mary sang in her cry of praise and hope: "With the strength of his arm, God scatters the proud. God casts down the mighty from their thrones and lifts up the lowly. God fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty-handed." (Luke 1:51-53) Yes, let us dare to sing with her and to pray for situations to change. Even when God seems silent, a path may suddenly open up³.

At the same time, let us do what we can, even when it may not seem much, to express signs of solidarity with people in distress around us, or who are caught up in war or forced to leave their country. Is it not this that will enable us to hope beyond all hope?

The reflections that follow come in large part from the meetings and conversations with young people living in countries at war or zones of conflict over the last year. I am full of gratitude towards those who shared their experiences and thoughts and also to our youngest brothers whose careful counsel put everything in order.

Bruce Mathew

The courage to hope

When we long to trust in God's love, what we see and sense around us so often seems to contradict that love. We are caught between what is already given and what is still to come. This space is not always very comfortable. But when it opens out towards a hope of fulfillment⁴, then something is set free within us.

Hope requires patience. "We hope for what we cannot see" (Romans 8:25), says the Apostle Paul. Turned towards what will come in fullness in God's time, yet also troubled with "fighting within and fear without" (2 Corinthians 7:5), do we dare to hold ourselves in that space rather than fleeing it?

"Hoping against all hope, Abraham believed" (Romans 4:18). Abraham, the forebear of many people of faith, held on to God's promise far beyond any reasonable hope. He and his wife Sarah received what seemed impossible for them.

At a time when his country was devastated by war and its inhabitants threatened by exile, and though he was himself in prison, the prophet Jeremiah made an investment in the future: he bought a field, so sure was he that God would not abandon his people (Jeremiah 32:6-15).

Such an astonishing gesture of hope makes faith become more real. It is a firm trust in what is as yet invisible and even uncertain. Can we hold on to such a hope? This ultimately reopens the source of joy⁵. Even in the most complicated human situations, what we had never dared hope for can become reality.

Today, incredible initiatives of hope⁶ are springing up in many countries where war wreaks havoc.

Listening to people of hope

To help us understand better what hope means, we need to listen to people who live in the midst of distress and violence. Is it not through their voices that God will lead us?

During my visit to Ukraine with two of my brothers, a church leader told us: "Prayer opens up a space that allows healing". I was very struck by his remark. Constantly confronted with the pain of his people, he sees that it is in their inner life that believers can stay open to welcome what is new.

⁴ In a commentary on Dt 4:34, Gustavo Gutiérrez writes: "God will not forget the covenant; loyalty is first and foremost memory. To be faithful is to remember, not to forget our commitments, to have a sense of tradition. Loyalty to the covenant presupposes remembering the sources of the covenant and its demands (...). But true faithfulness implies more than that; it also requires, and this seems less clear at first sight, projection into the future. To have a memory is not to remain fixed to the past. Remembering yesterday is important, but it is important because it helps us to stake our bets on tomorrow (...). Faithfulness does not consist in following beaten paths without initiative, but in permanently renewing them; it leads us – it should lead us – to innovate, to change, to design new projects" (Gustavo Gutiérrez, *El Dios de la vida*, Ediciones Sígueme, Salamanca, 1992, pp. 82-83).

⁵ In my conversations with young people living in situations of war, many of them spoke about the importance of singing as a source of joy and strength. This Letter will be published during the 2024-2025 European meeting in Tallinn. Let us not forget the "Singing Revolution" which contributed so much to Estonia regaining its independence peacefully in 1991. People descended into the streets in song to confront the threat they were faced with.

⁶ A person one of our brothers met whilst on a pilgrimage told him: "A creative anger is dwelling in me." It was that force that drives her to want to do at least one small thing to change the current situation.

⁷ “From the starlets [Siluan], he [Sophrony Sakharov] learned much that was to be fundamental to his spiritual life. Two things stand out: how to face the sense of abandonment when instead of God all one experiences in prayer is desolate emptiness, and how to cope with the anguish that accompanies intense prayer for the suffering world. The first was given meaning by the concept of God-forsakenness that Sakharov was later to develop more fully, the second by the injunction revealed in prayer to the starlets and communicated by him to his disciple: ‘Keep your mind in hell and despair not!’” Norman Russell, *Theosis and Religion* (Cambridge University Press 2024), p. 169

⁸ See Mark 2:1-12. Notice the strength of hope in the man’s friends who overcome all the barriers, digging through the roof of the house to try to help him and bring him to Jesus.

This is a process that does not necessarily produce immediate results, but which, perhaps accompanied by other means, opens a door to overcoming hurts and sorrow, and awakens the hope of a healed humanity. Prayer gives strength to stand firm in the face of the most complex situations⁷. It breaks the waves of discouragement when darkness seems to engulf everything.

A Palestinian woman living in France, but whose family is in Gaza, wrote to us: “The love that carries the wounded, the fragile, gives new strength. It makes me think of the paralysed man⁸ in the Gospel, carried by his friends and their faith. Prayer is also a way of resisting, and that’s important to me. But I’m human: after the news of the death of two members of my family, anger overwhelmed me, I shouted, I cried... When I came to my senses, I knew that God is there in suffering and despair, and that God carries us.”

This summer, while visiting Taizé, she said: “Every morning, I pray to find the strength to love rather than hate.” Her words are like a lamp on the road.

A young woman from an Asian country wracked by war told me: “Our people are overwhelmed but find comfort in the Gospel. How often were God’s people on the run? Still, community was created no matter how hard the situation was. God may have greater plans for us, but we must take one day at a time. Being able to live the present day is a gift and a sign that life is there to be lived fully. In prayer, there is a source of peace which enables us to encourage one another, finding meaning in sharing and solidarity.”

From Lebanon, I heard these words: “My mother is a testimony to hope. Despite everything, she always stayed standing. It’s because of her that I am who I am today. She taught us how to have faith in God and to pray. Each person who lives from trust reflects trust because they drink at the source and can become witnesses.”

Who are the witnesses of hope that each of us can discover and listen to in our own situations? Let us open our ears to hear what they have to say.

Striving for hope

How do we react when our plans are frustrated and our hopes are dashed? Jesus gives us a key to how we can remain people of hope.

Faced with a large crowd of hungry people, he “had compassion” on them, literally “his heart went out”⁹ to them. And he found a way to satisfy their needs.

That refusal to resign ourselves to situations of distress allows hope to take shape within us. It is the opposite of waiting passively, it involves a struggle¹⁰, there is no other way. Even our very longing for hope can lead us across the threshold from what is humanly possible to what is possible for God.

The hope given with Christ grants us a foretaste of what is to come about in fullness in God’s future. It is like a ship’s anchor.¹¹ It holds us firm when the storm is raging. It allows us to live out little signs of our faithfulness to the calling we have received and to the people entrusted to us. It is also like a helmet¹², protecting us from the adversity that can rain down upon us.

The Rule of Taizé speaks of never resigning ourselves “to the scandal of the separation of Christians who so readily profess love for their neighbour and yet remain divided”. For Brother Roger the unity of Christians¹³ was never simply a goal in itself, but a way to lead towards peace within the human family.¹⁴

The humble boxwood bushes around Taizé, though ravaged twice by parasites these past years, are suddenly springing to life again. From what was apparently dead, fresh sprigs grow as grey turns to green. Nature fights to survive, mirroring and encouraging our own fight to hope. Hope for creation¹⁵, and hope provided by God’s good creation, go together with hope for humanity.¹⁶

Remaining people of hope

Hope can so easily be smothered when we are faced with situations where no mutual understanding seems possible. Creating an atmosphere of suspicion risks ensnaring others in a net of mistrust.

This can happen in our communities, churches and families, as well as in society and in our countries. Such dynamics may be hidden or open, but they always drain our strength. Yet there are times when, faced with injustice, we must denounce evil so that people are no longer victims of other people.¹⁷

To remain in hope, we need each other. Hope flourishes when we are attentive to the needs of others. We can see people who even in the midst of the greatest adversity make a choice to live, to smile and to offer the little things that are possible each day.

⁹ The Greek verb σπλαγχνίζομαι (splanchnizomai) is very strong emotionally. It indicates a warm, compassionate response to need. It is difficult to translate: compassion, pity, sympathy, all convey something of it. But “his heart went out to them” perhaps expresses more fully the gut reaction that the verb implies. In Matthew (see 14:14, 15:32, 18:27, 20:34), the verb does not just refer to an emotion or feeling, but designates also a practical response which meets the need. In this case, Jesus heals the sick and will then feed the crowd. Emotion results in caring and effective action. The verb contains the Gospel in a nutshell.

¹⁰ Cf 1 Tim 4:10 “For to this end we toil and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe.”

¹¹ Cf Hebrews 6:19

¹² Cf 1 Thessalonians 5:8

¹³ The Synod on Synodality has enabled the Catholic Church to recognise and value the diversity which already exists within herself. The role of the delegates from other Churches in this Synod was important. Does this not give a new hope for the ecumenical vocation on the path towards the unity of all who love Christ?

¹⁴ Taizé was founded during a time of war. The “parable of communion” that we strive to live as brothers of different Churches, countries, cultures and ages needs constant care in order to be a sign of hope in the face of divisions in the human family.

¹⁵ Cf Romans 8:21-23

¹⁶ Faced with the challenge of climate change and the loss of biodiversity, how can we deepen the care for our common home where everything is linked?

¹⁷ We continue in our Taizé Community the path of ascertaining the truth faced with accusations of abuse and assault made against some brothers. The courage of people who have suffered and spoken out must make us seek ever more to learn from them. So often, they

search again and again new hope and life. They motivate us to do everything that is possible (see www.taize.fr/protection) to make the meetings held in Taizé and elsewhere safe for all and also raise awareness of the issues involved. We are also grateful to the work of the Commission for Recognition and Reparation (see www.reconnaissance-reparation.org/) for their listening to survivors and their mediation.

¹⁸ “I believe that hope is linked to truth. Until I accepted the prospect of death, I couldn’t be hopeful. This applies to all situations. As Christians, we can have a tendency to run away from situations that make us despair – politically, ecologically, humanely... It’s normal for us to be appalled by them, but it seems to me that hope encourages us to stand precisely there, in the reality of these situations, to look at them with truth. Georges Bernanos talks a lot about hope as a heroic virtue. It’s a virtue that drives us to action, not to run away, to fight for what we know or believe to be good. Hope leads us towards God’s promise.” Clémence Pasquier, interview by Clémence Houaille, *La Croix* 11/10/2024

¹⁹ In the *Kikuyu* (*Gĩkũyũ*) language one of the attributes of God is that God is “hope-worthy” – “*Mwĩthokeku*”: God in whom we can place our hope. *Mwĩthoko* – *Hope*; *Wĩthokeku* – *Hope-worthyness*; *Mwĩthokeku* – *Hope-worthy* e.g. *Ngai nĩ mwĩthokeku* | God is hope-worthy.

²⁰ “If hope means taking the measure of present dangers, it also teaches us to live in the present and believe in the future, without dwelling on the past and abandoning all resentment. It is, finally, what our soul hungers for and its absence makes us bitter or violent. Like love in the Song of Songs, hope breathes life back into the body that desire has deserted.” Corine Pelluchon in *L’espérance, ou la traversée de l’impossible* (*Éditions Payot & Rivages*, Paris, 2023) pp. 13-14

Hope is linked to truth¹⁸ and justice. Is this because they are qualities of God? Do we not see them in the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus? Nurturing hope requires facing the reality as it is, and seeing it in the light of God’s promises¹⁹.

A young person living in a conflict zone told me: “I was in a café reading my book, when rockets started to fly around us. People ran out, full of emotion, but I decided to stay and finish my reading.” Looking for shelter would also have been a sensible option, but sharing this story is a protest of hope against the ineluctability of war.

One of my brothers told me: “Hope is provocative, and more than that, it is contagious. The opposite of hope is indifference or resignation. During a recent visit to my country, which is hit by war, I saw people’s faces sad, worried and stressed. So I asked myself: ‘What can I do?’ And an idea came to me: whenever I’m driving and have the right of way, I will stop and give priority to the person in front of me. This costs me five seconds. But I could see this small act making people’s faces respond, easing my brother’s or sister’s pain a little.

Everything in us resists war and death.... Everything in us aspires to life and beauty.”²⁰

Easter hope

Where am I at this moment? At the foot of the Cross on Good Friday? In the joy of Easter Sunday? Or waiting not knowing where to turn on Holy Saturday?

Wherever I stand, can I glimpse a path of hope? It opens up before me when I look on Jesus who gave his life in love for all, who showed us a love which is stronger than all the powers of violence, hatred and death.

Hope does not rely upon analysis of the situation but on what is often a flickering flame of trust. Though fragile, this flame burns in the deepest night, as it did for the friends of Jesus. Many of them abandoned him at the time of his greatest trial. His love enabled them to return.

If only we could recognise the Risen Jesus! But his presence does not depend upon our recognition. Our hopelessness sometimes blinds us as it blinded Mary of Magdala. The Risen Jesus asked Mary: “Why are you weeping?” and “Who are you looking for?” (John 20:15). This second question echoes his very first words in

John's Gospel "What are you looking for?" (John 1:38). After he has entered into the deepest human sorrow and death, the search for meaning turns out to be desire for a presence²¹.

Risen from the dead, alive in God, Jesus draws us to himself.²² Meeting us in our innermost being, whether it is filled with sadness or joy, the Risen Jesus opens to us his relationship with the Father and to communion with each other in the Holy Spirit. We are no longer prisoners of our own despair – a new life is possible.

Paul writes: "Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). Let us live from that love. May the Holy Spirit lead us always!

Pilgrims of hope, pilgrims of peace

Faith in the Resurrection has enabled many people to cling on to hope in the midst of distress. It is a source that leads us beyond our own impossibilities, so as to let our heart go out towards others and to act.

To believe in the Resurrection of Jesus takes a lot of courage and daring. It means striving not to be paralysed by the presence of death and destruction that are around us today.

Out of situations that seem hopeless, God can create something new. God can bring life out of death and even reconciliation out of conflict.

The women, Jesus's friends, who came early on Easter morning to his tomb were asking "Who will roll away the stone?" (Mark 16:3). What are the stones in our own lives that we must ask God to roll away so that new life may be born within us?

That new life helps us to stand up, it leads us to journey together with others. We become pilgrims of the hope that we carry within us. Is it not also a hope for peace? For "Christ is our peace" (Ephesians 2:14). Will we hear him say to us: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you."²³ I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27-28).

As pilgrims of peace²⁴, we understand that there is no true peace without justice²⁵. The peace we carry within us, which comes from the hope we live from, makes us inwardly free. It allows us to love life and resist injustice, as we persevere moved by the Holy Spirit.

²¹ "It is the very person on the cross that suffers like us, was rendered a no-body, who illuminates our tragic human existence.... We are not looking to Jesus as a mere example to follow, neither shall we try to idolize him. We see Jesus as the God who takes human form and suffers and weeps with us." Kwok Pui Lan, *theologian who hails from Hong Kong*, "God Weeps with Our Pain," in *New Eyes for Reading: Biblical and Theological Reflections by Women from the Third World*, ed. John S. Pobee and Barbel von Wartenberg-Potter (Meyer Stone Books, Bloomington, IN, 1987), p. 92

²² Cf John 12:32

²³ "My peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you" (John 14:27). The characteristic of whoever is fully mature is not to be easily moved by the things of the world, troubled by fear, agitated by suspicion, shaken by terror, troubled by grief, but to stand firm in the calm of faith, as if on a firm and very safe shore, in the face of the threatening flood and the storms of the world. It is this steadfastness that Christ brought to the minds of Christians, infusing them with the inner peace granted to those who have been through trials." Ambrose of Milan, *Treatise III*, On Jacob and the Blessed Life 6, 28, quoted in Soyons l'âme du monde (*Les Presses de Taizé*, 1998 and 2025) p. 109

²⁴ See www.taize.fr/pilgrims-of-peace

²⁵ See Psalm 85:10 "Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other."

One day, we may find ourselves praying the song of Zechariah.
An elderly man in an occupied land, he rejoiced over an
unexpected birth and celebrated "By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us to give light to those
who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet
into the way of peace" (Luke 1:78-79).

Are we ready to hope beyond all hope?

*Risen Christ,
by the presence of the Holy Spirit,
you have poured God's love into our hearts
and you enable us to hope beyond all hope.
And from deep within us,
little by little,
a surprising peace emerges.
Praise be to you!*

Staying longer in Taizé

The meetings in Taizé are possible thanks to young volunteers, aged between 18 and 29, who remain for longer – between a few weeks and a year. The brothers share with them what is most essential in the life of the community:

Together... praying

Nothing in Taizé would be possible without the three common prayers, and it is also through prayer that the volunteers help to welcome all those who come.

Together... living in community

Forming a small, temporary community with young adults from every continent, from different Churches, in the shared richness of diversity.

Together... serving others

Making it possible, by being available, for young people to be welcomed in Taizé.

www.taize.fr/volunteering

Continuing a journey together in 2025

- International meetings in Taizé from Sunday to Sunday for young adults aged 18 to 35
- From 13 to 27 April, Holy Week and Easter Week in Taizé
- From 13 to 18 July, Friendship meeting between young Muslims and Christians
- On 30 and 31 July, prayers with songs from Taizé in Rome during the “Youth Jubilee”
- From 17 to 24 August, a week of sharing and witnessing Orthodox faith
- From 24 to 31 August, a week of reflection for young people aged 18 to 35
- From 28 December 2025 to 1 January 2026, the next European Meeting of Young Adults, whose venue will be announced in Tallinn.

www.taize.fr/dates