

The Medicine of Hope

by The Rt. Rev. Gary Lillibridge

Where can I go then from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

(Psalm 139)

When I was asked to write a brief article for this month's new magazine, I was invited to address the overall theme of where I find hope in times of trouble. My personal theology includes the strong conviction that God's reign arches over all of life, so for me it is not so much a question of "Is God here during this difficult time?" but rather, "How shall my faith in God help me through this trouble?" And my answer usually comes back to "hope," for it is a great medicine of faith.

The simple verse from Psalm 139 that I cited above is a familiar starting point for me in times of difficulty. The writer of this psalm has quite a bit to say about the conscious recognition that God is always nearby, come what may. I find tremendous comfort and hope in this psalmist's conviction that the Lord has "searched me out and known me," and that the Lord has "traced my journeys and my resting-places and is acquainted with all my ways."

I find the Book of Psalms to be one of the most spiritually meaningful books in the Bible, particularly when I need to find hope. A primary reason I believe this is because so many of the psalms are written directly to God. The authors write in good times and in bad, "in season and out of season," as it were. They are people who are recording their personal struggles, joys, anger, blessings, hopes, and thanksgivings -- all of which

represent the wide range of human response to what this life brings.

It seems to me that even a person who believes that God "dictated" the words of the Bible would have to acknowledge that the psalms are an exception to that understanding. It is in this book, perhaps more than any other in the Bible, where we see people wrestling with life, addressing God directly, and emerging through it all with a holy and sound hope. I even find hope in the psalms where the writers conclude with a tone of despair, for by addressing God personally and directly in their trouble, they are acknowledging that God is there. It is not as if these writers have "lost" their faith (presumably those who have "lost" their faith aren't writing to God), but rather they are in a confusing and frustrating place and trying to find hope.

The writer of Psalm 139 has great hope and is most grateful – "I will thank you because I am marvelously made; your works are wonderful, and I know it well." So, whether I "climb up to heaven" or "make the grave my bed" or "dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea," I know that "even there, God's hand will lead me and hold me fast." I pray that the same is true for you, and I commend the Book of Psalms to you for holy reading and prayer; for in this good book we can all know, through the ups and downs of whatever comes our way in this life, that "the Lord is gracious and full of compassion" (Psalm 144). **t**

Bishop Lillibridge was born and raised in San Antonio, ordained to the priesthood in 1983 and became a bishop 2004.

