

Blessed Jakob Gapp: Fighting with Hope in God

Hope is the theological virtue that has to do with transcendence, with faith and love. It has its source in the Promise of God and tends to the fulfillment of this Promise: the Kingdom of Heaven. It is not a prognosis about the future, but a vital, profound, active and proactive attitude in charity. This is what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: "Hope is the theological virtue by which we aspire to the Kingdom of Heaven and to eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in the promises of Christ and relying not on our own strength. *Let us hold fast to the confession of hope, for the author of the promise is faithful* (Heb 10:23)" (n. 1817). Consequently, "the virtue of hope responds to the aspiration to happiness which God has placed in the heart of every man; It takes up the hopes that inspire men's activities and purifies them so as to order them to the Kingdom of heaven; it keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during times of abandonment; it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude. Buoyed up by hope, he is preserved from selfishness and led to the happiness that flows from charity." (n. 1818).

There are no better words that can explain the earthly struggles and supernatural hope of the blessed Marianist martyr, Father Jakob Gapp (1897-1943). Throughout his life Gapp was a fighter for the values he loved: his homeland, his family, the Marianist vocation, the education of young people, social justice, the faith and the Catholic Church, his priesthood, the poor, the truth. His struggles led to a war wound *, a prison camp, the incomprehension of his superiors and confreres, the denunciation of a relative, persecution by the Nazi authorities, expatriation, deceived and betrayed, prison, trial,



an infamous death sentence by beheading, oblivion and rescue of his memory by way of the Cause of Martyrdom and subsequent beatification in 1996, Solemnity of Christ the King.

**According to Father Emilio Cárdenas: "Probably a medal like that, a second-class silver medal for valor, was received by Father Gapp on the Italian front in August 1916."*

For all these reasons, the virtue of Blessed Gapp's hope did not consist in an illusion about the hereafter, but was active and proactive in charity, sustained by a granite faith in Eternal Life.

Father Gapp not only hoped for himself in God, but he also faithfully hoped for the fulfillment of eternal goods for his confreres, relatives and for all men. His whole life was oriented towards eternal happiness, the true content of Christian hope. That was how Gapp expressed himself in his letters and that was testified to by those who knew him (*Positio super martyrio*, p. 106).

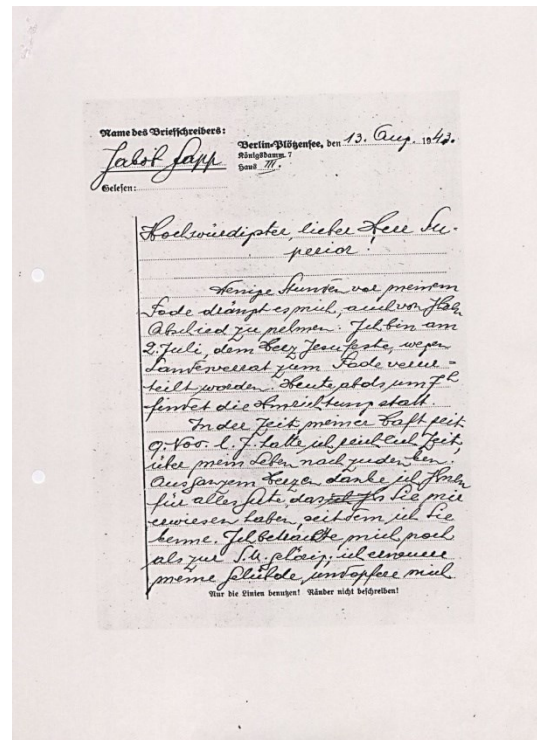
Even a quick glance at a few paragraphs of his letters gives us insight into the strength of his hope, of his unwavering faith and of the courage of his charity.



Letter of May 1, 1939, to the wife of his nephew Seppl, who died suddenly: "What a cruel surprise, Olga, your letter gave me! [...]. My God, what a blow to you, poor Olga! That somebody can die that quickly and unexpectedly! [...] I am convinced that he has found a good place in the heart of Jesus [...]. There is a reunion and then an eternal stay together. Think much of these truths, Olga! [...]. Olga, work for the children, prepare them for a happy death. Death is the most important moment of life."

In another letter from December 19, 1939, he writes: "Life here on earth is a preparation for the life on the other side." On April 2, 1942, to his sisters Ana and Josefina: "The earth is not our final home. Many of our loved ones are already "over there". We have to firmly familiarize ourselves with these weighty thoughts. I am already quite familiar with them, I look every possibility calmly in the eye." Back to Olga on April 24, 1942: "If only we live well and then join our dear ones on the other side. There is so much already waiting us. My studies are my joy. I am always thinking that will be useful to me at home. To work, pray, suffer and die with the Tyrolean people."

But, above all, it is in his farewell letters to the Marianist superior and his cousins, before the execution of his death sentence. In these letters, Blessed Gapp expounds his faith in God and in eternal life with greater intensity: To Father Jung: "Give my best to all of our fellow brothers; I will remember you to those who have already died" [this is where his stupendous confession of faith appears for the first time] "Everything passes, only heaven remains." Finally, the wonderful letter to his relatives, also dated August 13, 1943, hours before he was beheaded, where he repeats "everything passes, only heaven remains".



We do not reproduce quotes from this letter, but we urge you to read it in the compilation of Gapp's manuscripts made by Fr. Emilio Cárdenas, *Everything passes, only heaven remains. Writings of the Martyr Jacob Gapp, sm*, Madrid, PPC, 2024 (p. 278-279, Spanish edition / p. 283-284, French edition / p. 272-274 English edition).