

## ***ENCOURAGE AND TEACH WITH PATIENCE***

The following homily was given by Bishop Paul S. Loverde on February 9, 2012, at the Vigil Service for Bishop Joseph Estabrook, at Good Shepherd Parish, Alexandria, Virginia.

### **Bishop Joseph W. Estabrook: A Beacon of Hope**

An image depicted in the episcopal shield of Bishop Estabrook provides a prism or lens through which I invite us to reflect this evening as we gather for his Vigil Service in this church where he so often prayed and ministered to God's people. That image is the anchor. Yes, it is a symbol of Bishop Estabrook's service in the Navy—a service that was outstanding in every aspect. But, the anchor is also a symbol of hope.

In the Apostolic Exhortation written by Blessed John Paul II and directed in a particular way to his brother bishops, the bishops are described as “Servants of the Gospel for the hope of the world.” “At the same time, in keeping with the designated topic of the Synod, the Fathers reviewed their ministry in the light of the theological virtue of hope... It is in fact the task of every Bishop to proclaim hope to the world, hope based on the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ: a hope ‘which not only concerns penultimate matters but also and above all that eschatological hope which awaits the riches of the glory of God (cf. Eph 1:18), which surpasses anything that the human heart has ever conceived (cf. 1 Cor 2:9), and to which the sufferings of the present cannot be compared (cf. Rom 8:18)’. A stance of theological hope, together with faith and love, must completely shape the Bishop's pastoral ministry. The Bishop is called in a particular way to be a prophet, witness and servant of hope... the Bishop stands in the midst of the Church as a vigilant sentinel, a courageous prophet, a credible witness and a faithful servant of Christ, ‘our hope of glory’ (cf. Col 1:27), thanks to whom ‘death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying nor pain any more’ (cf. Rev 21:4)” (*Pastores Gregis*, nos. 2-3). I repeat: we bishops are to be “Servants of the Gospel for the hope of the world.” Indeed, that is who Bishop Joseph Estabrook was and what he endeavored with all his being to do.

The two scripture passages proposed for our meditation this evening and chosen by the bishop himself underscore and highlight why the bishop is to be a living instrument of hope rooted in Christ Jesus as he teaches, sanctifies and shepherds God's people and why all God's people can and must live with enduring hope as we all journey this life towards our eternal home. Both passages proclaim so clearly and without any reservation that God in His love for each one of us, a love revealed in His Son Christ Jesus, has chosen us in Christ to belong to Him, to be His children, adopted yet real members of His own family the Church.

In verses three to four from Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, we hear proclaimed the generosity of God's call: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world,...” and the purpose of that call: “...to be holy and without blemish before him,”

Yes, God's plan included His adopting us as His children. “...he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will.” Three gifts in particular flow from His call: deliverance or ransom from original sin and its effects, forgiveness of our sins, and a type of true wisdom. “In him we have redemption by his blood, the forgiveness of transgressions, in accord with the riches of his grace that he lavished upon us. In all wisdom and

insight, he has made known to us the mystery of his will in accord with his favor that he set forth in him as a plan for the fullness of times, to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth.” God’s ultimate purpose was that all be one in Christ by accepting His gift of salvation in Christ’s Dying and Rising—an acceptance that means our free “yes” so that in the end all will be renewed in Christ. In the First Letter of Saint John, a similar message is proclaimed.

Bishop Estabrook endeavored to proclaim the hope that flows from God’s call and plan; he did this as a disciple of Jesus made so in Baptism, a priest ordained by the Sacrament of Holy Orders and, above all, as a bishop consecrated to act in the fullness of Christ’s priestly power.

His fundamental attitude—the compass by which he directed his life was hope-filled. It was not a hope that was unrealistic or Pollyannaish, but a hope rooted in Christ Himself and in His Gospel. He revealed that hope in prayer where He encountered Hope Incarnate, the Lord Jesus; in being an instrument of divine mercy in the Sacrament of Penance; in making present Christ’s Death and Rising at every Mass and nourishing God’s people with Jesus Christ Himself; and in preaching, teaching, and guiding.

This stance of hope was so evident in his ministry to young people. In every celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation, he lived, preached and witnessed to that hope, Who is Jesus Christ, and to His Gospel. He did this as well in his tireless work for vocations, priestly and religious. How much energy he gave to this apostolic work and how creative he was in proposing and developing programs to invite the young to hear Christ’s call.

Yes, Bishop Estabrook was a living instrument of true hope to each one he met. Each one of us here could relate specific instances of the hope he engendered in us: an enduring and realistic hope.

He was certainly a hope-filled brother to a group of bishops who gathered regularly for prayer and support—a “Jesus Caritas” gathering. How we found in him support in prayer and fraternity. He was such a brother to us!

It was in his illness that Bishop Estabrook was so clearly a person of authentic Christian hope. Diagnosed with a terminal illness, he never reflected a negative spirit. Rather, he pursued the treatments that the doctors prescribed with that positive attitude which was rooted in his hope in Jesus Christ. He continued his ministry as a bishop as best he could. I never heard him complain.

But there comes that time when the journey is coming to its end. He recognized that it was then the moment to end the therapy since it could no longer prove beneficial. He came back to this parish and to his family here to be with them one last time. Then, he returned to his brother and sister-in-law’s home where he had been and continued to be so lovingly cared for.

On February 4, the Lord Jesus came to take Bishop Estabrook to his real home; Our Blessed Mother and Saint Joseph were also with him as he crossed the bridge from this life to the next. Yes, to the end, Bishop Estabrook was a person of enduring hope and to us a beacon of such hope. Indeed, he was a “servant of the Gospel for the hope of the world.”

No one among us is perfect. The scriptures remind us that even the just person sins daily. So, we entrust this faithful and devoted bishop to the Lord of Mercy and Love, asking Him to give our brother the reward of his hope: seeing God forever face to face.

It is with that same spirit of enduring hope rooted in Jesus Christ that we affirm: our brother Bishop Estabrook has not so much gone away as he has gone ahead!