

PATIENCE

Homily given by Fr. Dennis Koliński, SJC

St. Peter's Church in Volo

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“Now, I am going away to him who sent me. ... it is for your good that I should go, because if I do not go, the Paraclete will not come to you; ... I still have many things to tell you, but you cannot bear them now. But when the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.”¹

When Jesus said that, could you imagine the apostles saying something to Him like: “When are we going to see you again? When are you going to send the Paraclete? Why do we have to wait? Why don't you give us the Truth now?” Or could you imagine them thinking to themselves: “We've followed you around for three years, trying to understand everything that you've been telling us. So, why couldn't You have just tell us this Truth yourself? Why do you have to send someone else to do it?” It's so human. We don't want to wait. And in our “have it all right now,” instant gratification culture, it's sometimes so hard to have patience. Although the apostles didn't realize it, Jesus was, among other things, trying to teach them patience.

The virtue of patience, a supernatural aid that strengthens a person in the face of difficulties, belongs to the virtue of fortitude. As a supernatural virtue patience “enables one to bear physical and moral sufferings without sadness of spirit or dejection of heart. It is one of the most necessary virtues in the Christian life because the trials and sufferings we must inevitably suffer in this life require the assistance of some virtue to keep us strong and firm lest we yield to discouragement and sorrow. Many souls lose the merit of their trials and sufferings because they fail to exercise the virtue of patience. Indeed, they suffer even more than they would have because of their lack of conformity to the will of God.”²

Each one of us has a sufficient share of trials and suffering to make us saints but how we endure them determines what spiritual value they will have for us. The virtue of patience helps us endure trials and sufferings for supernatural motives—for the love of God. We all know that trials and suffering are an inescapable part of human life, yet unfortunately, many people complain and rebel, losing all the merit they could have gained from them. Others lose merit because they willingly endure trials and sufferings, but out of pride. Perhaps, they advertise how much suffering they have or think that their suffering makes them special. Our true motive should always and only be submission to the will of God and hope of eternal reward.

We need the virtue of patience when suffering through illnesses and physical ailments because they can sometimes be very difficult. Yet the greatest challenge to our patience can often be those small everyday trials in dealing with other people: putting up with their quirks, dealing with disobedient children or elderly parents who keep saying the same thing over and over, those trying moments on the road when everyone else seems to be in your way, waiting at the check-out in the grocery store as the person in front of you argues about the price of an item and everyone has to wait while an employee goes back to check and all that you want to do is get through and get out of

there. These too are trials that require the virtue of patience. Even at this present moment you need patience, for without it you wouldn't even be able to sit here and listen to me.³

And if patience is a virtue, then we have to conclude that impatience is a vice, meaning that it's of the devil. Much impatience, in fact, has its origin in pride, one of the capital sins. History is filled with examples of impatience, which has often risen up in direct defiance of God's plan. Adam failed to be patient and sinned against God's very simple command. Cain killed Abel in part because of impatience. Esau sold his birthright to Jacob because he was impatient for a bowl of gruel. After the left Egypt, the Israelites were incessantly impatient in the desert.⁴ Impatience has bred heretics, predominantly through pride. And impatience in even small dealings with our fellow man so often leads us to a lack of charity, once again, often motivated by pride. A person can't forgive and turn the other cheek without patience. But when one has patience, anger, discord and conflict are quickly dissipated. Patience makes it easy to be charitable. Impatience brings upon a person self-inflicted sufferings.

Patience is essential if we wish to become holy in imitation of Christ, who had to exhibit so much patience with His apostles. He practiced patience by humbly yielding to those, who would torture and kill Him, knowing full well what awaited Him. He knew that the Resurrection was to follow but if He wouldn't have had patience, He wouldn't have been able to endure His cruel Passion and Death so calmly and devoid of either anger or despair.

But perhaps, the greatest example of patience is God's patience with us, restraining His wrath as we constantly offend Him, humbly putting up with our indiscretions, continually giving us yet one more chance and holding off the day of our judgment in hopes that we will finally get it right. So, why can't we have patience with those around us? It's always good to remember that patience is a thing of God and that he who is patient and mild is an imitator of God the Father.⁵

St. Cyprian tells us of the inestimable value of patience. It "calms anger, restrains the tongue, controls the mind, safeguards peace, governs the manner in which we serve God, breaks down the onslaught of lust, lowers the swelling of pride, puts out the fires of enmity, curbs the arrogance of the rich, comforts the poor in their need, protects the blessed integrity of maidens, the steadfast virtue of the widow, the mutual love of spouses. ... Patience makes men humble in prosperity, courageous in adversity, mild in the face of injuries and contempt. It teaches us how to forgive promptly those who offend us; and should we offend teaches us to plead long and earnestly for pardon. It withstands temptation, it endures persecution, it brings sufferings, as well as martyrdoms, to their perfect fulfillment. It is patience which makes firm the foundations of our faith. It is patience, which subtly brings about the increase in our hope. It is patience which directs the mind to an awareness of what we are doing so that as we walk forward we may keep to the way of Christ."⁶

The strength of patience is necessary in order to endure all of the trials and afflictions of this life. It will make a person humble and drives away evil. He, who is both patient and humble, will be far less likely to fall into mortal sin, growing instead in sanctity and becoming more like Christ, who was both patient and humble. Through patience we are proved and tested. Through the course of our lives we all have to endure much suffering and pain, many trials and inconveniences. The impatient man complains

and easily falls into sin, perhaps even blasphemes. “The good man is proved by his patience”⁷ and grows in his likeness to Christ.

¹ John 16:5, 7, 12-13.

² Aumann, Jordan. O.P. *Spiritual Theology* (The Faculty of Theology, University of Santo Tomas: Manila, 1989). (<http://www.domcentral.org/study/aumann/st/default.htm>)

³ St. Cyprian, “On the Advantages of Patience” *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*. Volume 2. (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 1996), 346.

⁴ Ibid, 352.

⁵ Ibid, 348.

⁶ Ibid, 353.

⁷ Ibid, 352.