

Patience

“By your patience possess your souls.” Luke 21:19

Patience is not a trait that many of us could consistently claim. We are a people in a hurry. Our natural lives seem to whirl on at a frantic pace. We have more to do than any two or three people could accomplish in a lifetime. We schedule activities so tightly that we are often late because of last minute interruptions. After all, why should we wait around with nothing to do?

And we expect others to be punctual. As we sit in the doctor's office, the blood pressure rises. If the waitress is not there just when we want our bill, the service is intolerably slow! And those drivers who can't go at or above the speed limit, slow us down! Our lives seem to be ruled by the clock.

Spiritually we also tend toward impatience. We can be intolerant of the failings of others and ourselves. Are we willing to forgive seventy times seven those who hurt, or just irritate, us? Do we not often expect our children, or spouse, to live up to the image we have of them, right now? When we wrestle with a difficult question, such as how the Lord could allow evil on earth, do we not want to see it clearly, and right now? And when we look at ourselves, do we not become frustrated that we are not as good as we wish to be, or fallen short of the ideals we set out for ourselves?

Consider what the Lord predicted for His disciples. Telling them that they would be persecuted, put in prison, betrayed by family and friends, hated by all, He told them, “by your patience possess your souls.” How can one be patient in the face of such adversity? How can we have the confidence of the Psalmist who said:

“Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him;
Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way,
Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.
Cease from anger, and forsake wrath;
Do not fret—it only *causes* harm.
For evildoers shall be cut off;
But those who wait on the Lord,

They shall inherit the earth." (37:7-9).

Having patience certainly sounds like a goal worthy of pursuing. To so trust in the Lord that we are not worried if we succeed or fail, become rich or poor, would bring much contentment to our lives. Ulcers and nervous disorders could be put aside, for we would not worry about the future. With patience we could tolerate all the frustrations of this life, and possess our own souls.

Impatience, though, is not very peaceful because a characteristic of impatience is indignation or anger when we do not achieve our ends, or achieve them as soon as we would like. Impatience also is not very productive, for if we are unwilling to wait for the Lord we tend to become upset with Him, and question if He exists at all (AC 4654; cf SE 915). Being discontented with our lots, we tend to drift from Him and feel that we must rely on ourselves alone, effectively cutting ourselves off from His presence, His peace.

How sad this is, for a model of patience is the Lord Himself. Think of how He leads us in His providence. He guides every aspect of our lives, promoting good and then responding to our free choices. His love is so all encompassing that He never gives up, in spite of the hurdles we place before Him. In each of us He sees the potential angel, or at least the potential for some angelic life and happiness. We might look at ourselves and see all the faults, all the evils, but He does not. As the Writings note:

"A person sees nothing of this universal providence, and if he were to see it, it could appear to his eyes only as do scattered heaps and assembled piles of materials to passers-by, the materials out of which a house is to be built. But to the Lord it appears as a magnificent palace constantly being built and enlarged." (DP 203).

Each one of us is like a magnificent palace to the Lord, one that He will be patiently constructing to all eternity.

His eternal perspective enables Him to tolerate our shortcomings, forgiving our evils, for He immediately focuses upon how He can lead us to grow from our mistakes. He comes to where we are, never demanding that we meet some exacting standards before He will help us, or care for us. He did not leave

mankind when we fell into evil and blackness. Rather, He came to be with us, to experience our pains, our frustrations, that He might show the way out, the way to heaven.

Consider also the patience He taught us as the crucifixion neared. When arrested, wrongfully accused, He did not fight back. He was silent before His enemies. "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7). He possessed His soul in His patience. Although they attacked His body, in His patience He overcame them, so they did Him no lasting harm:

The natural example He set, with His warnings of the coming persecution, led to martyrdom for many early Christians. They took patience to mean a turning of the other cheek so that no resistance was offered to verbal insults or physical abuse. Their concept of patience was often equated with passiveness, and virtually encouraged them to look for persecutions to show how trusting they were.

Our image of patience can be akin to this. We can think that there is some intrinsic merit in suffering or in letting ourselves be used by others. After all, if I have endured this much, surely the Lord will take me into heaven! Some had this attitude on earth, and actually sought to make themselves the least of all, in hopes of being the greatest in heaven. But they did not find heaven in the other world (AC 952). Their desire to earn, or buy, their way into heaven by acting as doormats here only illustrated how self centered their life had been. Suffering patiently, if it is to prove how good we are, only brings conceit: I am better than you because I can endure more pain.

Patience, the patience which the Lord leads us to find, is not passive. It is not a meekness that invites abuse, allowing evil to go unchecked. When the word "patience" is used in the Sacred Scriptures, its internal sense is perhaps different from what one might expect. It does not mean peace, or meekness. Rather, it means spiritual conflict: temptation (See AR 185, 593; AE 813:2f).

How could this be? How could patience involve struggle? The spiritual quality of patience involves a very active seeking and defending of what is good and true. In spiritual struggles we are to wait for the Lord, having patience, by tenaciously hanging on to the hope for heaven. We cannot surrender when we

fall into doubts or uncertainties. The Lord can not help us, save us, unless our patience is active.

This is seen in the command Moses gave to the Sons of Israel as they prepared to cross the waters fleeing the Egyptians. He told them to "stand still, and see the salvation of Jehovah, which He will do for you today. For the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you shall see them again no more forever. Jehovah will fight for you, and you shall keep silence" (Exodus 14:13, 14). Spiritually, this is describing the kind of patience we need to overcome in our spiritual struggles (AC 8172f). We need to wait for the Lord to save us, for we cannot do so ourselves. Like a swimmer in trouble who dangerously flails his arms about, we tend to think we must find the solution, the right answer that will disperse the doubts, and return happiness - which only gets in the way of the Lord's healing presence. We have to wait for the Lord to part the waters before we can cross. To have patience is to maintain the belief that He does save, but to actively keep our selfishness in control so that He can work.

And waiting for our God is often not pleasant. A Psalmist wailed, "I am weary with my crying; my throat is dry; my eyes fail while I wait for my God" (69:3). To continue resisting what is wrong while waiting for help can seem impossible. Surrendering may seem so easy, so sensible. Why fight, when nobody else cares? Why resist, when all that comes is suffering? We are told, "blessed are all those who wait for Him" (Isaiah 30:18), but it means little in the midst of spiritual turmoil.

Perhaps the prophet Jeremiah provided the best rationale for patience by asking, "are there any among the idols of the nations that can cause rain? Or can the heavens give showers? Are you not He, O Lord our God? Therefore we will wait for You, since You have made all these" (14:22). When we feel so alone, where else can we turn? Who else cares as much as the Lord? He is our God, our Rock, our Strength. We wait for Him because we know from our innermost recesses that He is good, our Lord and our God.

And so our patience is both waiting for Him and resisting our evils so that He can come. Patience involves not surrender but struggle. As we attempt to achieve a patient attitude, we can sense something of the Lord's perspective - recognizing the turmoil and evil around us, yet holding fast to what we know to

be good and true. Through patience we can possess our souls by not being anxious about perhaps less than ideal choices, or seeing evils played out in the world or our loved ones. We have patience by recognizing what is spiritually valuable, and then embracing that as our rock and our salvation.

And we also need patience in dealing with ourselves. We can become aware of the pain our selfishness causes, yet have patience by not surrendering, by not giving up hope. Patience does not mean tolerating evil. But also it does not mean considering ourselves hopeless for our shortcomings or less than angelic actions.

Genuine patience is the confidence that all power to save comes from the Lord alone, the recognition that we cannot change everything at once, and the effort to resist the influence of evil in our life. Our patience here is a preserving of what we have seen as true in spite of the persecution of our own faults.

By developing patience over a lifetime we can possess our soul of heavenly qualities, and share in the trust of the Psalmist who knew, "I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry" (Psalm 40:1). Amen

Lessons: Psalm 62
Luke 21:8-19
DP 203