

11B 2018 SML
MK 4:26-34

In my 29 years of hearing confessions, the number one, most commonly confessed sin is impatience. “Do I ever need more patience~!” Everyone struggles with it. The saints struggled with it. St. Theresa of the Little Flower confessed, “Restraining my impatience cost me so much that I was bathed in perspiration.”

Yves Congar wrote a book entitled The Need for Patience, and at the start, he describes it for us:

Patience is a quality of mind – or rather, of soul – which takes root in these profound convictions: first, that God deals the cards and fulfills in us his plan of grace; and second, that for great things, certain delays are necessary for maturation . . . this profound patience like the sower who knows the seed will grow (hence today’s gospel) . . . those who do not know how to suffer no longer know how to hope. The man who is too busy, and who wishes to enjoy immediately the object of his desire, does not know how to attain his goal. The patient sower who confides his seed to the ground and to the sun – he is the man of hope . . .

So, to approach this pivotal virtue of patience, I propose we look at it in three ways: patience with God, patience with ourselves, and patience with others.

First, patience with Our Blessed Lord. To be honest, in our pride, in my pride, sometimes we think we know better than God. In observing the mess of His creation, are we not tempted to cry out, “Lord this is no way to run a railroad . . . Lord, this is no way to run a universe.” I remember a priest beginning a homily at the funeral of a crib death baby saying, “All of us are tempted to say that God has made a terrible mistake.”

Are we not especially impatient with God’s apparently slow time table in answering our prayers?

Quoting the arrogant Microsoft Giant, Bill Gates, “Just in terms of allocation of time resources, religion is not very efficient. There's a lot more I could be doing on a Sunday morning.” Bill, let me know how that “gone viral quote” works out for you in the next life.

An article in America Magazine some years back contained an interview with Archbishop Dominic Tang, who was imprisoned from 1958 to 1980 by communist China:

Archbishop Tang laughed when I asked him how he spent his time for 22 years. “Everyone wants to know that. I prayed. You had to pray. You say the Rosary, counting the prayers on your fingers. You try to fill your mind with religious ideas. Otherwise, you are finished! In fact, after so many years, your memory becomes weak and you can’t remember. But everyone knows the Rosary.

When God doesn’t answer prayers as fast as we like, when asked to trust God in a Communist prison cell for 22 years, I have no better answer, and frankly, I need no better answer than to say, as I often do, “God has ‘this,’” whatever “this” is. I need no better question than to ask, “If you compare ‘this,’ whatever this is, to God, What is stronger? What is more powerful?” And the answer is always God, even when it seems God is slow on the uptake. You may remember the Amtrak train wreck in Philadelphia in May of 2015. My choir director from St. Benedict had a second job as an Amtrak train conductor, who was a hero, single handedly clearing two railroad cars of that train. A hero! However, that experience traumatized him and we met several times afterwards. I walked him into the Church, pointed at the Tabernacle, and asked,

“Tom, what’s bigger, the train wreck or God?” Literally for him, the train wreck or God? He didn’t hesitate. God!

In contemplating patience with God, the flip side is helpful, namely, contemplating God’s patience with us. And perhaps the answer is to be as patient with God as God is patient with us.

When we confront:

- ✓ the evil and immorality of the world,
- ✓ the stubborn refusal of people to accept God’s saving invitation,
- ✓ the blatant disregard for His law,
- ✓ the apathy and lethargy of people toward their faith,

do we not grow impatient with God, and find ourselves like the apostles asking Him to rain down fire, or like the crowds begging for a sign just to convince people? Yet, we have a God who prefers the gentle, soft, quiet way, Who never imposes Himself, Who invites and then waits, Who compares the growth of His reign to a tiny seed (hence, today’s gospel). We have a God who is eternally patient. And are we not called to be like Him?

Patience with God, patience with ourselves . . . and finally, patience with others. Usually, of course, we approach it the

other way around, and consider the virtue of patience to mean just with others. Odds are we will not be patient with others if we are not first, patient with God and second, patient with ourselves.

I'm on the personnel board. On the list was a priest who wanted a transfer after being stationed with a rather trying pastor. I said, "What this priest needs is to be assigned to a warm, loving, wise and holy pastor." Six pairs of eyes glazed over and six jaws dropped. Finally, the Bishop broke the silence and said to me, "And where do you think we're going to find him?" Of course we all had a good laugh, but why are we surprised that we find ourselves is imperfect, less than ideal, flawed?

It's Father's Day. I cannot say my Dad was the bastion of patience. I will say he had more patience than my mother, and we could all stub our toe on that bar, which is why my Dad taught us how to ride a bike, my Dad taught us how to drive a car. If I had a dime for every time my Mother said to me, "Oh, go tell you father what you just did," and on the flipside, if I had a dime for every time my Father said to me, "For God's sake, whatever you do, don't tell you mother!" I'd be a rich man. Today's parables on growing things reminds me of my Dad

and the lawn. The Swifts would be at Mass, all of us holding hands praying the “Our Father,” and my Dad would be miles away with his mind on the lawn. We would be praying, and my Dad would look to me, “Are you going to cut the grass today?” Not a man of patience.

Many of us, especially members of Alcoholics Anonymous, know by heart the opening words of Reinhold Niebuhr’s famous prayer, a fitting prayer on patience to end this homily:

“God, grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things that I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.”