

3rd SUNDAY OF ADVENT – A (December 11, 2022)

“Be **patient**...until the coming of the Lord...You too must be **patient**...Take as an example of hardship and **patience**...the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.” St. James in our second reading has a rather obvious focus, doesn't he? Although the specific context is the timing of Jesus' second coming in glory, we can't help but notice how he keeps coming back to patience, being patient.

Does anyone here ever struggle with patience? (I thought so...) It's one of the things that I and most if not all other priests here most often in confession. Sometimes the computer runs slow, or we get stuck behind slow-moving traffic or hit a lot of red lights in a row, or the person in front of you in the checkout line has two full carts and they need to do a price check or two. One reason for impatience in our own time: we want what we want, and we want it now. We have instant coffee, instant communications via texting, instant shopping online, instant-on TV. Young people, did you know that TVs didn't always have remote controls? Or that you actually had to wait awhile for the television set to warm up before the picture would finally come on?? Oh, the suffering that we had to endure back in the old days.....

These sorts of things, of course, are mere inconveniences...and rather trivial ones at that. But there are other and more serious situations that we have to face and in which our patience is really pushed, sometimes almost to the breaking point. The pain or weakness we experience from illness or the aging process, the heartache of troubled or broken relationships, the anguish and sorrow we experience at the death of a loved one—these sorts of things don't lend themselves to an instant 'push-button' solution that cures our impatience or removes our pain.

And could it be that our toughest struggles here are with God himself? We pray for healing, for reconciliation, for consolation; we don't feel like our prayers are being answered, and so we feel impatient with God. That's not a rare thing, nor is it necessarily an evil or sinful thing. Feelings in and of themselves are simply emotional responses we have to something; you can't help how you feel...but you can choose and decide how you will respond—and that's where our moral responsibility enters in.

I can't help but think that much of our impatience is the result of thinking that we are or should be in control of life, of others, of ourselves. Of course, many things are under our control—for example, what cereal to have for breakfast or what book or magazine to read. But many others are not under our full control like illnesses and those other realities I mentioned earlier. Several years ago someone gave me this little wood block with the very simple statement: “**God** is in control!” It's simple, but it's real and it's very true. It's a good and needed reminder of the fact that my impatience so often stems from the illusion, the myth that I am (or should be) in charge of all things.

Given all this, how can we respond to our struggles with impatience and the temptation to respond in less-than-helpful or less-than-Christ-like ways? Prayer is and has to be the first suggestion. Pray for patience, and especially in the midst of a situation in which you think your impatience is ready to go off the charts. “Lord, please help me not to explode in anger right now because my spouse/child/parent/co-worker is driving me crazy right now!” Prayer may be the

last thing you want to think about at that moment, but it's vitally important because it will remind you that you are in fact not alone or defenseless: God and his grace is there, and he is simply waiting to be invited into your heart, mind and soul. Another prayer suggestion: pray for the person(s) you are impatient with. Maybe they need an extra dose of grace or help from God, and your prayers for them can help them grow in the holiness that God desires both for that person and for you.

One last prayer suggestion: pray in thanks to God for what you have, for everything that you are and have comes first from overflowing love that God has for you. And as we reflect on this whole patience thing, let's give God a special thanks for the gift of his patience with us. Have you ever thought about that—the reality of God's patience with us and not just our struggles of patience with God and/or others? St. Peter says it so well in his second letter: "The Lord does not delay in keeping his promise—though some consider it 'delay'. Rather, he shows you generous patience, since he wants none to perish but all to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

The patience of God—that is something I've become more aware of as the years go by, or (I should say) that the Holy Spirit has helped me to realize more deeply. I say that I want to grow in love, holiness, mercy, and all those good things...but my actions and decisions don't always match my intentions. Of course, Jesus calls us to ongoing conversion and we cannot excuse ourselves from that challenge or think "I'm good enough; I don't need to try any more." But when (not if, but when) we mess up, God once again and very patiently extends his hand to us, helps us back up, and says: "don't ever forget that I love you more than you can possibly imagine! Let's try again, shall we?" Parents, you have known and lived that loving patience and encouragement:

- your toddler learning to take those first steps;
- your student struggling with some tough homework; or
- your older child starting his first paying job or her first serious relationship.

Well, God's patience with us is so much bigger and so much more powerful. As St. Peter said: "[God] shows you generous patience, since he wants...all to come to repentance". So let's remember and be grateful for that divine patience. And let's pray for the grace and the desire to show to others (and ourselves!) that patience that God wants to give us and show to those others.