

## PATIENT ENDURANCE

As she drove into the driveway, the nervous feeling in her stomach increased. "What mood will he be in now?" she wondered. Each day was as unpredictable as the next. Some days her husband was just sullen and moody. Other days he would be on a tear, jittery, aggressive, bossing her around. Still other days he would angrily explode in succession at each effort she made to sooth him. Her own emotional life was at low ebb. "How much longer can I go on? Why doesn't the Lord do something?" she would ask in prayer. And ask. And ask.

What is to be done? All of us who love people in such situations ache for them to find a way out. We pray for them to find a way out. We offer them our ideas on ways out. But for many, many people there is no way out of the chronic distress they experience. That doesn't mean there is no hope. There is always hope. Jesus will provide a way. Not out, but through.

We are not a patient people. We are easily bloated with self-importance. "I am not the sort of person who should have to wait!" Really? Where do we get that idea from? Or this belief, "I'm the kind of person who should be treated well." Again, where do we get that from? Some might say, from the Bible. Well, not so. The Bible does not teach that we have an inalienable right to be treated well. It instead says that we who follow Jesus have an inalienable right to treat others well. And we also get to trust Jesus.

Jesus said, "Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial which is coming on the whole world." (Rev 3:10) This same phrase, "patient endurance," is repeated many times in the New Testament as a primary Christian virtue. We need to pay attention to this. The Apostle Paul said that our hope is in resurrection. Not a soft, comfortable life here and now—but resurrection into glory. He goes on to say, "Hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it with patient endurance." (Rom 8:25)

What is the greatest act of love towards God? To trust him. To simply trust him, patiently enduring whatever trial he has allowed our way. The entire gospel could be described in this: "We get to live trusting Jesus Christ with everything." I have known many people over the years just like the woman described above. Their hope is in Jesus. They understand that this present life will have its



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trials. They know they must carry their cross. And they do so, keeping their eyes on Jesus. They see themselves as pilgrims in this life. They know their real home is heaven. So they patiently endure, trusting God.

Our society assumes that we have a right to avoid pain at all costs. From the latest headache medicine, to legislation minimizing the pain of mortgage rates, to candidates pandering to the "felt needs" of those voting in November—the assumption is that we should not have to suffer. That is just crazy. We see it in the Church too. Much preaching in the American church today (which I too have helped foster) equates to "How to have a successful life." Which translated means, "Here's how to avoid pain and suffering." Where do we get this from? Jesus Christ, our model, lived a life of great suffering and ended with crucifixion! His first followers all similarly suffered. At various times they were beaten, whipped, imprisoned, stoned, scorned, mocked, abandoned, and rejected. All of them, with the possible exception of the Apostle John, were martyred for their faith. Why would we assume that we who follow Jesus the Crucified will not similarly suffer? Jesus said, "Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also." (Jn 15:20)

Don't get me wrong. We who endure patiently find in doing so that we actually conquer. Not in a high-handed manner, but in a quiet confidence that nothing can shake. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." (Ro 8:35) Carrying Christ's cross will also bring Christ's resurrection power and life. In fact, the only way we share in Christ's glory is by sharing in his suffering. (Rom 8:17)

There is a painting on the wall of my office I love. It pictures Jesus, carrying his cross, with a look of supreme resignation on his face. The patience in his eyes is not one of defeat, but of determination. "I will endure this cross. I will complete the task set before me. I will honor my God."

Lucille was at the nursing home every single day for the last five years her husband lived. Janice raised her children by herself and counted herself blessed. Steven raised his retarded son, supported him, and when his son died, held his head high even in his sorrow. Mary raised two daughters with cerebral palsy, one into her thirties, and the other into her fifties. Jacob continued to live with a wife who was manic-depressive, loving her and helping her as he was able. Linda showed up for her custodial work at the school, day after day after day, doing her work unto Jesus Christ. Bobby continued to attend church every week, even though his parents thought he was being silly. Brianna, 16 years old, took care of her four-year old brother. Her mother was often too often drunk to do so. Brianna kept her eyes on Jesus.

Each person mentioned above is a real person I have known. This world would have encouraged them to "insist on their rights." Jesus encouraged them to trust him. And they did.

Certainly, each felt like giving up, probably many times. But each one kept going. How? By faith. By prayer. By talking to themselves. By talking to friends. By the encouragement of their church. By the grace of God. Through their trials, they began to find in themselves a virtue of "patient endurance." They found divine help to take the painful circumstances of their lives, and live through them, one step at a time, unto Jesus. They kept going and did not give up.

Don't you give up either. Keep your eyes on Jesus.

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