



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States Monthly Message for the Monastic

May 2023 Patience vs Impatience

An Elder once said that “Patience is the power to stay on the cross” patience is an important aspect of our relationship with God and with one another, and it is something that we must actively work to develop. First and foremost, patience requires trust in God's plan for our lives. We must recognize that God is in control, and that His timing is perfect. This can be a difficult truth to accept, especially when we are facing challenges, setbacks, or disappointments. But we must remember that God's ways are not our ways, and that He often works in mysterious and unexpected ways.

Furthermore, patience requires a willingness to endure suffering and hardship with grace and perseverance. We must resist the temptation to give up or to become bitter when things don't go our way. Instead, we must strive to cultivate a spirit of endurance, trusting in God's promise that "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18).

If one tries to provoke you to a fight, there is at hand the admonition of the Lord: 'If someone strike thee, He says, 'On the right cheek, turn to him the other also.' Let wrong-doing grow weary from your patience; If a spiteful tongue bursts out in cursing or wrangling, recall the saying: 'When men reproach you, rejoice.? The Lord Himself was accursed before the Law, yet He alone is blessed. Let us, then, His servants, follow our Lord and patiently submit to maledictions that we may be blessed! If, with slight forbearance, I hear some bitter or evil remark directed against me, I may return it, and then I shall inevitably be bitter myself. Either that, or I shall be tormented by unexpressed resentment. If, then, I retaliate when cursed, how shall I be found to have followed the teaching of our Lord? For it has been handed down that a man is not defiled by unclean dishes, but by the words which proceed from his mouth; and, what is more, that it remains for us to render an account for every vain and idle word. It follows, then, that our Lord forbids us to do certain

acts, but at the same time admonishes us to endure with meekness the same treatment at the hands of another.

Also, obedience itself stems from patience: never does one who is impatient obey nor does a patient man ever refuse obedience. Who, then, could deal adequately with the value of that patience which the Lord our God, the model and patron of all that is good, has displayed in Himself? This is, indeed, a picture of the divine patience which exists, He did not wrangle or cry aloud; neither did anyone hear His voice in the streets; a bruised reed He did not break, a smoking wick He did not quench.? He did not force one who was unwilling to stay close to Him; He scorned no one's table or dwelling; in fact, He ministered personally to His disciples by washing their feet. He did not despise sinners or publicans, He showed no anger even toward that city which refused to receive Him, even when the disciples wished fire from heaven to fall upon such a shameful town; He healed the ungrateful, yielded to His persecutors. More than this, He even kept in His company the one who would betray Him and did not firmly denounce him. Why, even when He is betrayed, when He is led like a lamb to the slaughter- for thus [is it writ-ten]: 'He does not open His mouth any more than does a lamb in the power of its shearer'-He who could have had if He wished, at a single word, legions of angels from heaven to assist Him did not approve of an avenging sword on the part of even one of His disciples. It was the forbearance of the Lord that was wounded in the person of Malchus. And so, He actually cursed for all time the works of the sword and by healing him whom He had not Himself struck, He made satisfaction by forbearance, which is the mother of mercy. I say nothing about His crucifixion; it was for this that He had come. Still, did there have to be such insults attending the death He must undergo? No; but as He went forward to His death, He willed to have His fill of joy in suffering: He is spat upon, beaten, mocked, disgracefully clothed, and even more disgracefully crowned. Marvel at the constancy of His meekness: He has in no degree imitated man's impatience. For this reason particularly, you Pharisees, you should have recognized the Lord! Patience such as this no mere man had ever practiced! Such were the manifestations [of His patience].

On the other hand the origin of impatience is found in the devil himself. Every sin can be traced back to impatience. What sin previous to this sin of impatience can be imputed to man? He was innocent and a close friend of God and a tenant dwelling in paradise. But, when once he yielded to impatience, he ceased to relish God and could no longer endure the things of heaven. From that time on, as a man delivered up to the earth and cast away from the eyes of God, he began to serve as an easy instrument for impatience to use for everything that would offend God. For, immediately, that impatience which

was conceived by the seed of the Devil with the richness of evil gave birth to a child of wrath and instructed its offspring in its own arts. Since it had plunged Adam and Eve into death, it taught their son, also, to commit the first murder. We can ascribe this sin to impatience, had Cain, the first murder.

Is it not clear that Israel itself, through its impatience, was ever sinning against God? Forgetting the heavenly arm whereby it had been rescued from the afflictions of the Egyptians, it demanded of Aaron gods to be its leaders, while it poured its contributions into an idol of its own gold. For, it had borne without patience the delay necessitated by Moses' meeting with the Lord. After the rain of manna as food, after the water that followed and flowed from the rock, they gave up hope in the Lord, unable to endure a three-days' thirst. For this, too, they were charged with impatience by the Lord. But, not to range over individual instances: never would they have been destroyed had they not fallen into sin by impatience. Why did they lay hands on the Prophets, except that they could not bear to listen to them? And more than that: they laid hands upon the Lord Himself, being unable to endure even the sight of Him. But had they acquired patience, they would now be free.

There is another, and very strong, motive which gives rise to impatience, namely, the desire for revenge, Revenge mistakenly appears to be a soothing of one's pain, but in the light of truth it is seen to be only evil contending with evil. Nevertheless, before the Lord each is guilty of having injured a fellow man and the Lord forbids and condemns every act of wrongdoing. There is no hierarchical arrangement in wrongdoing, nor does position make any distinction in that which similarity makes one. Therefore, the precept is unequivocally laid down: evil is not to be rendered for evil. 'How will you forgive and experience forgiveness? if you cling to your injury through a total lack of patience? No one whose mind is violently disturbed against his brother will complete his offering at the altar unless first he has been reconciled to his brother through patience. If the sun goes down upon our anger, we are in danger. We may not live a single day without patience. Yet, since patience governs every aspect of a salutary way of life, what wonder that it also paves the way for repentance which, as a rule, comes to the assistance of those who have fallen?

So, too, in those examples in our Lord's parables there is a breath of patience: it is the patience of the shepherd that seeks and finds the straying sheep (for impatience would readily take no account of a single sheep, whereas patience undertakes the wearisome search) and he carries it on his shoulders, a patient bearer of a forsaken sinner. In the case of the prodigal son, too, it is the patience of his father that welcomes him and clothes him and

feeds him and finds an excuse for him in the face of the impatience of his angry brother. The one who had perished is rescued, therefore, because he embraced repentance; repentance is not wasted because it meets up with patience! Consider now love, the great bond of faith, the treasure of the Christian religion, which the Apostle extols with all the power of the Holy Spirit: how is it learned except by the exercise of patience? 'Love, he says, 'is magnanimous.' It derives this from patience. 'It is kind.' Patience works no evil. 'It does not envy.' Envy is certainly a characteristic of impatience. 'It is not pretentious.'. 'It is not puffed up, is not ambitious,' for that does not befit patience. 'It is not self-seeking.' It suffers [the loss of] its own goods provided that it be to another's advantage. 'It is not provoked. What, then, would it have left to impatience? Therefore, he says, 'Love bears with all things, endures all things.' Of course, it does, because it is itself patient. He is correct, then, in stating that it will never fall away. Everything else will pass away and come to an end. Tongues, knowledge, prophecies are made void, but there persist faith, hope, and love: faith, which the patience of Christ has instilled; hope, to which the patience of man looks forward; love, which patience accompanies, according to the teaching of God.

God is fully capable of being the trustee of our patience: if you place in His hands an injustice you have suffered, He will see that justice is done; if a loss, He will see that you receive compensation; if a pain, He acts as healer; if death, He restores life. How much is granted to patience. For it pays attention to all His prescriptions, it becomes surety for all His commands: it strengthens faith, governs peace, sustains love, instructs humility, awaits repentance, places its seal upon the discipline of penance, controls the flesh, preserves the spirit, puts restraint upon the tongue, holds back the [violent] hand, treads under foot temptations, pushes scandal aside, consummates martyrdom. In poverty it supplies consolation; upon wealth it imposes moderation; the sick it does not destroy. It attracts the heathen, recommends the slave to his master, the master to God.

Patience is not simply the ability to endure hardships and difficulties, but it is also the capacity to remain present and fully engaged in the present moment. When we are patient, we resist the temptation to escape or avoid the present moment, and instead, we embrace it with open hearts and minds. We learn to see the world as it is, without judgment or expectation, and we develop the ability to respond to it with wisdom and compassion. Patience is a virtue that requires practice and discipline. We must learn to cultivate patience in all aspects of our lives, from the smallest daily tasks to the greatest challenges we face. We must be patient with ourselves as we make mistakes and learn

from them, and we must be patient with others as they navigate their own paths.

It is the ability to endure trials and sufferings with a steadfast and peaceful spirit. Patience is not a passive acceptance of difficult circumstances, but rather an active trust in God's providence and a willingness to persevere in the face of adversity. We can see examples of patience throughout the Scriptures. In the book of Job, we see how Job endured tremendous suffering and loss, yet he remained faithful to God and did not lose hope. In the New Testament, we see how the apostles endured persecution and imprisonment. May we all strive to cultivate the virtue of patience in our lives, and may we find comfort and strength in the words of St. James: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:2-4).

Finally, patience requires a spirit of humility and forgiveness. We must recognize that we are all imperfect and in need of God's mercy and grace. When we are wronged or hurt by others, we must resist the urge to lash out or seek revenge. Instead, we must extend the same forgiveness and understanding that we ourselves have received from God. Let us strive to cultivate patience in our daily lives. Let us trust in God's plan, endure suffering with grace, and extend forgiveness and understanding to one another. May we be reminded of the words of St. James, who wrote, "Be patient, therefore, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:7-8). Amen.