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St. Scholastica's Priory
Manila

Dear Sisters,

On the second Sunday of Lent we read the Gospel about the transfiguration. As we reflect on the reading, we recall some such “transfiguration moments” in our lives. When in the day to day living of our religious life, we become tired, weary, discouraged, or burnt out, God sometimes sends us moments of consolation. Maybe it is because we heard an inspiring sermon or listened to a challenging talk. We feel the embers of our zeal once again bursting into flames. Or maybe we went on a Retreat or days of renewal and once again the message of God becomes real and urgent. Then we experience the same temptation as Peter who wanted to stay in Mt. Tabor forever. As we relish our consolation we hesitate to “go down” and resume our daily routine, live with the same members of our community who irritate us, provoke us, disedify us. But actually the test of the genuineness of the renewal we felt we experienced is going back to the plains below facing once again the challenges of our life, but now with renewed strength, determination and zeal. And as we resume taking up our cross, it is good once in a while to recall our “transfiguration moments” and let them energize us when we are low bat.

We are on vacation in the month of April, so I wish us all restful days. Let us take time out to enjoy one another, go on outings or some form of “simple joys of maidenhood!”

Sincerely yours,



Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB

STATIO CONFERENCE

“Lord, grant me PATIENCE...”

by Sister Pia Lansang, OSB

INTRODUCTION

This statio conference is the fourth in our series of reflections on the fruits of the Holy Spirit (*Gal. 5:22*). The heading I chose is a short “*mantra-prayer*” to God. “*Lord, grant me patience.*” To whatever degree each one of us needs this gift of patience, and under whatever circumstances we need it at present, -- not to forget the recent (or still ongoing) turmoil and suffering in certain parts of the world (Japan, Libya, New Zealand, and in some parts of our own country) -- may we all obtain this patience. But first, what is this patience we are wishing for in our lives?

PATIENCE, WHAT IS IT?

At first glance, this virtue immediately poses a tough challenge in our daily existence. As one author says, PATIENCE seems to imply “*adverse conditions that can produce annoyance, exasperation, sorrow ...and can be gained by ascetic exertions....*” **(1)**

One example given is the stoic patience of ancient West and Buddhist monks in the modern East. But thank God, Scriptures offer some more consoling and inspiring thought on the topic of patience. In Acts 5:41 we read “*As they (the apostles) left the council, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name...*” Here the patience borne freely and willingly in the name of Christ is a privilege and a badge of honor.

So, patience, as a fruit of the Spirit, clearly does not stop at enduring suffering for suffering’s sake. Patience goes further; patience helps not only to tolerate sufferings but to feel happiness in them, as the Apostles showed. And down the centuries, history has shown us this in the lives of Christian martyrs.

In our liturgical framework, one of the Antiphons of our Daytime Prayer which we chant throughout the 1st 4 weeks of Lent says “*...let us prove ourselves in patient endurance.*” What a reminder as we celebrate in this season Christ’s patient endurance of his suffering for our salvation.

PATIENCE LINKED TO OTHER FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

Looking deeper into the essence of the fruit of patience, there is joy and happiness, not always apparent, contained in PATIENCE this fruit of the spirit is linked with the other fruits (virtues) -- “*one has to use much subtlety to find real differences among the terms like Kindness, Goodness, Gentleness*”. **(2)** Patience is also associated with perseverance, fidelity, long-suffering, and love. (1 Cor 13:4).

Seeing patience in this wider context expands the soul and moves away from a limited view of patience.

I. OUR CONSTITUTIONS ON PATIENCE

For the next step I decided to browse through our Constitutions to find out what they say about our practice of the virtue of patience. After all, our Constitutions are based on Scriptures, the RB, and sound tradition. They offer us spiritual texts to reflect on, and the Norms offer us concrete guidelines for living our Missionary Benedictine way of life. By way of a review, I would like to share some 3 instances where Our Constitutions mention the virtue of patience: twice in spiritual texts, on Community (IV), and on Mission (V) and once in Norm 513.

1. *Patience in the Context of Conflicts in Community (IV,4)*

“Sometimes, however, they (conflicts) can only be borne in patience and prayer.”

Our Constitutions point to the necessity of patience in the face of “conflicts” which the RB refers to as the “*thorns of contention*” (ch.13:12) which are “*likely to spring up*” in our living together in the monastery. “Contentions” could be any form of “rivalry” or “competition” (like wishing to be better and more important than everybody else). Conflicts could also mean “opposition” and “strife” where we tend to act with impatience, irritation or loss of temper. Actually, such conflicts can crop up wherever humans live with one another.

Const. IV, 4 points forgiveness...But where Constitutions do not it”, or simply to do encouraged “*to face them dialogue*” We can strive “nothing will happen anyway”; “I am afraid ...” Patience and prayer are in themselves two positive (and powerful) choice of action to take. Patience, therefore, is not a matter of passive resignation.



to the importance of reconciliation and conflicts in community are unavoidable, our merely take a passive stance of “grin and bear nothing about it. On the contrary, we are (conflicts) *and solve them in honest* for courage – instead of being resigned to

Are there some conflicts in my community which I am called to *bear in patience and prayer*? How can we grow in patience in our dealings with one another?

2. *Patience in the Context of Mission (V,5, par.3)*

“Patiently we evoke their (people we serve) hidden talents ... leading them to self-reliance”

I find this a beautiful spot to speak of patience – in the context of our missionary work. Our environment in the Philippines is such “fertile ground” for the exercise of patience, especially where we are engaged in integral evangelization. The poor comprise the majority of our population – the jobless, the street people, the beggars, the sick in our hospitals -- all this can teach us patience. Where do we begin?

Our Constitutions say further “*Leading them gradually and confidently towards self-reliance*” (V, 5,par 3). The word “*gradually*” already brings up the need for a patient attitude – not to expect results overnight, but to allow for time and process. We are lucky to have the role of service (servant) in our work which teach us patience.

Our environment of dealing with people helps to prepare us a lot for patience: Education. Formation. Training. All need patience and perseverance. I read once, that if you are among children – you learn patience. And if you are a teacher – you can learn patience. We might add:

if you are an administrator or a Superior, you have to learn even more patience, both with people and paper work. The negligent; the slow learners, -- all types (including ourselves) can challenge our patience. Nurturance. Development. Growth. Building up: all this requires lots of patience and time. And the same text in our Constitutions points out to *“a humble willingness to listen and to learn; listening, is a sine qua non of patience. Mission is a patience-filled task. “ Rome was not built in a day. Neither is the Kingdom of God. “Lord, give me patience....”*

Where, in my mission (present work), am I most challenged to be patient?

What gains have I experienced in persevering with patience with regard to my missionary service -- abroad or at home?

3. Patience and the Elderly (Norm 513)

“By their prayers and suffering borne in patience” our elderly Sisters participate in our mission.

Precisely because old age has its own trials and difficulties, for example, lingering illness, weakness and loneliness, our elderly Sisters have the privilege of engaging in the apostolate of prayer (vigil) and combined with the patient endurance of their age-related sufferings. With the cessation of their active ministries and the start of “retirement” (moving from the fast to the slower lane) they continue to participate in our mission. Their prayer and contemplation, daily sitting before the presence of the Lord, is a powerhouse for the efficacy of our mission. Don’t we often say that more things are wrought in prayer, more than we can imagine? And the merits of suffering united with Christ are incalculable!



In old age we hope to savor the harvest of the fruit of patience – the result of a life lived in the Spirit. You and I know how many of our old Sisters are an inspiration to us. In fact, a number of them currently still continue to serve us in patience, without complaint, in our stations and apostolates.

How do I deal with trials and sufferings as I advance in age?

II. PATIENCE IN OUR AGE OF SPEED

When things did not quite come out right at work, one of our German Sisters in Olpe used to say to her staff, *“Herr, gib mir die Geduld, aber schnell!”* (“Lord, give me patience, but fast !”) How often have we experienced similar moments, faced with some trying circumstances and wishing we had that gift of *sacra patientia*? Quick, Holy Spirit, grant me patience. Right now. How is my patience affected by rush and speed? Which happenings usually provoke impatience in me? How do we “recover” the patience we often “lose?”

Our present age of fast in almost everything is probably not the ideal setting for developing this virtue of patience. *“...speed seems to govern modern life, and many of us feel there are no chances to slow things down. (3)* The reality of our modern life today: Loads of activities. Crowded schedules. Fast foods and fast travel (except of course in the heavy traffic of Manila); fast Email (less and less “snail mail?”) and fast delivery; speed machines, faster transactions. Neither is our age of computers and technology conducive to developing patience. Patience, is not the “in-thing” of our present day lifestyle. Yet, don’t we all enjoy “Google?” A

flood of information at a click! Immediate and almost unlimited results and answers to your questions. It is said that with its speed (granted that our server is working well), Google would cumulatively save people more than 3.5 billion seconds every day. (4) What do we do with those “saved” seconds? Do we gain any quality time? Do we attain more quiet and unhurried confidence where we can patiently savor the passing of the hours? Where is the place of patience in the rhythm of my present life? Can I sit patiently, in quiet contemplation, amidst the daily urgent tasks and activities?

Patience in Crisis

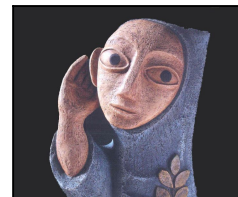
And yet amidst all the fast “on the run” activities, many things are beyond our control. I think of Niebuhr’s prayer “*Lord, grant me the serenity for the things I cannot change...*” Serenity is a characteristic of patience. So is calmness in the midst of the storms we have to weather. As I am typing this article, we are filled with TV images of long lines of OFW’s returning from war-torn Libya, Bahrain, and Japan, the latter being hit by multiple disasters: earthquake-tsunami-nuclear radiation. How much patience is called for in these circumstances, both from rescuers and victims alike! All those hours of waiting... The most industrialized country of Asia has had to slow down.

The whole world took notice of Japanese patience. In fact, I received the following text message on my cell phone (here abbreviated). “*It’s almost like the Japanese were another specie (sic). No riots, no chaos, People (patiently – my addition) queuing up for hours on end and just buying what they need so that the next person has something left...*” Then follows a prayer in the message: “*Lord, bless the Japanese. They may not bear your name but they surely bear your character.*” Amen.

III. PATIENCE AND LISTENING: A Little Exercise

I came across a little practical exercise on patience which I find so “Benedictine” too. Here is the gist: *Before a conversation begins, “Remind yourself... to LISTEN with love and patience. LISTEN. Be patient and wait.” LISTEN! Don’t interrupt others while they talk, nor finish their sentences”(5)*

It’s about patient LISTENING(*Ausculata*; “*Dinggin*” in our Filipino language). This exercise says that the tendency of “interrupting” is most especially a temptation in busy people ..., those extremely busy, fast thinkers, filled with so many programs to juggle in their hands, and a drive to accomplish so much under the sun. (6) But this tendency it is also in us whenever we are pressed for time.



Ausculata

We wish to hurry someone along, interrupt someone’s thought or finish her sentence...and this encourages both parties to speed up nervously their speech and their thinking....The Result? We become impatient, annoyed, irritable, and stressed out. (7)

Patience and Deeper Listening

Patient Listening can teach us the art of Deeper Listening which we do in *Lectio* and

Contemplation. We need to develop a “contemplative body”, -- to sit in stillness, be rapt in attentive and patient listening as we strive to do in our daily *Lectio*. Here, patience can be a response to another kind of “trials” – the trials “inside me”, of restlessness, distractions, discomfort, maybe even boredom at times. Some of these trials may seem trivial but they all call for the asceticism of patience.

Have I ever felt a lack of patience in my *Lectio*, like running away or “cutting corners?” How can I grow in attentive and patient listening to God’s word? . Am I aware of God’s own patient love for me as I listen to His word in *Lectio*?

On the ordinary level, patient listening prevents selective listening and does away with prejudice and bias, because patience is an expression of reverence and love for the person before me. Spiritual directors, formators and counselors are trained especially for this patient listening, a service that mirrors God’s own patience with us. But we can all desire this gift and pray to obtain the grace.



Patient Accompaniment

How can we learn this beautiful art of patient listening? How do we learn to treasure the elements which contribute to the process: a loving quiet heart; a quiet mind; and a disciplined body. In spirituality we like to speak of “contemplative listening” which is a loving and patient listening to the movements of one’s heart toward God (union with God).

IV. PATIENCE AND JOY

Scriptures gives us beautiful texts on “patience joined with joy” found especially in the Epistles. In citing a few selected examples here, I was inspired by an article I came across on “Patience -- The Art of Persevering in this Life” (8)

We could see this connection, for instance, in the spirit of *Col.1:11*: “*May you be prepared to endure everything with patience while joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.*” Here we see that it is the strength that God gives us the patience. As one of the fruits of the spirit, patience helps us to endure with joy. The example of Jesus shows us how he endured the suffering of the cross. Jesus, although he asked at first if the chalice could pass him by, says in the end “But your will be done.” And Jesus did so because of the JOY that was set before him:Hebrews 12:1-2 says “*..and let us run with perseverance (patience) the race that is set before us, looking to JESUS the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross,...*” .

The Scripture text goes on to show us how Jesus precisely “looked forward with joy to what was beyond the suffering he had the patience to remain steadfast in the midst of severe suffering.” (Forrest) So we, ourselves “*may not grow weary or lose heart.*” (*Heb 12:3b*). We could also recall Paul’s words “*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us*” (*Ro 8:18*). When we remember the joy that is to come, we can embrace with patience our present sufferings and trials.

Joy and patience, -- we will understand this connection (obtain the “fruit”) after a process of growth in paschal spirituality. To discover that underneath, yes, in our suffering there is joy. The eyes of contemplation will reveal to us the joy of a patient God crucified.

An image from nature that comes to my mind are those very cheerful flowers called “Patience” which I see in Tagaytay and Baguio. They’re not in every garden and place, but they bloom freely and in abundance. It is as though “patience were “popping up” at every instance of one’s life as you take a walk outdoors.



“Patience” in bloom

I remember a teacher saying in class that certain flowers, in fact, actually bloom in the most difficult conditions, that is, in unexpected places, like in freezing temperature and heights (the Edelweiss), or in stony cracks and rocky ground. As a missionary in Africa, I delighted in seeing the carpets of tiny flowers blooming, despite the great aridity, in the awesome Namibian desert.

V. PATIENCE IN THE RULE OF ST BENEDICT (RB)

1. *Patience in various circumstances*

The RB mentions patience in a number of places. For some examples: the sick ones must be patiently borne with (36:5); patience towards the erring brother who fails to amend (43:17); bearing injuries patiently as the 4th step of humility (4:34); when tasks seem impossible to carry out, the disciple is to explain patiently to the Superior his reasons why he can’t do the job (68:2). Two other instances seem to be an acknowledgement of the practice of patience by: 1) the applicant who perseveres to knock at the monastery door, and bears with the difficulties and harsh treatment -- because of his patience and persistence, he should be allowed to enter (58:3). 2) The monks who manifest patience can still strive for greater virtue (2:25) as admonished by the Abbot. Clearly, patience is one of those important spiritual tools which the RB teaches us in our spiritual journey as Benedictines -- a journey which is always centered on Christ (72:11).

Incidentally, this chapter 58 cites the “*eagerness for trials*” (implied is patience in trials) as one requisite for becoming a novice. The novice should be clearly told about the “*dura et aspera*” (“hardships and difficulties”) that will lead him to God. Training in patience amidst trials (toughening?) starts early in formation.

For further reflection, I will take up only RB 72:5 which is directly relevant to our day-to-day dealings with one another in community life.

2. “*Patientissime*” – with *Greatest Patience*

“*....supporting with the GREATEST PATIENCE one another’s weaknesses of body and behavior*” (72:5).

The original text in Latin uses “*PATIENTISSIME*” a superlative form to describe the kind of patience we should have when dealing with one another’s weaknesses of body and character. This use of a superlative has different translations showing the wealth of nuances which all point to the same thing: that means to bear with the “*greatest patience*” (Coll. MN also Ampleforth), “*utmost patience*” (B. Sause); with “*most tolerant patience*” (Bolton Abbey). All translations equally bring out the strongest possible degree of patience, stretching us to the limits, in dealing with one another’s physical and spiritual/moral weaknesses.

In the ff. reflection, A. Boeckmann’s “*Perspektiven....*” (9) gave me a lot of insights. I am interlacing these insights with some of my own observations.

“Utmost patience” – why such an emphasis?

Why is Benedict so concerned about practicing patience to the highest level, pushing ourselves to the extreme limit to exercise the greatest degree of patience? He was a father and shepherd to the community with a variety of characters. Today we would probably even use such expressions as “eccentricities” of character and occasional “quirks”, while always realizing how all of us do have our own share of irritants to others.

And why such a strong emphasis on patience (*utmost/greatest patience*) for bearing with each other’s infirmities? Sr. Aquinata points out that this corresponds to the fervent love (72:3) **(10)** which we must foster with good zeal we ought to foster. Our patience towards each other’s infirmities is an expression of this love.

The practice of patience, be it in bearing injuries, or in the service to the sick, or in dealing with the erring brother / sister is then to be seen within the framework of love, the love of Christ. It is a participation in the passion of Christ.

“Love is patient” - (11); “Love bears all things...endures all things”.... (1 Cor. 13). When patience is motivated by love (is done for love) – then we have understood the law. The greatest commandment is love. “And the greatest is LOVE.” (1 Cor 13:13) Again, patience does not mean to simply “accept” (passive attitude) or negative resignation, but patience is strength, love, constancy and courage, perseverance and an active forbearance.

In our weak humanity, we readily notice other people’s weaknesses, yet fail to accept ours. In failing to accept our own weaknesses, *they become the “magnifying glasses” that we use in seeing the weaknesses of others.* **(12)**

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, let me quote RB Prologue 50 which speaks in the context of faithfulness in the observance of the Rule.

“...THROUGH PATIENCE we shall share in the passion of Christ so that in the end we may receive also a share in his kingdom.

As Christians called to follow Christ in patient endurance (not only in Lent), may we be able to say with Paul, in the words of Scriptures. *“I am now rejoicing in my sufferings....and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, the Church” (Col.1:24).*

Happy “*Laetare Sunday*” (4th week of Lent) as we all “*look forward to holy Easter with joy and spiritual longing!*”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

The reflection questions are built into the conference.

Take for discussion any of the questions given on pp. 5, par 2; 6, par 1; 7, par. 1 and 2; 9, par. 1 and 2.

End Notes

- “The Holy Spirit in Theology and Spirituality”, by F.Gomez, St. Paul Publications, Makati, c. 2010, p.226. (2) Ibid.
- (3) “*The Great Rush Forward*” by A Patil, *NY Times Suppl. of Mla Bull.* 3/12/2011, p. 1,3 (4) Ibid.
- (5) “*Don’t sweat the Small Stuff*” by R. Carlson , NY 1997, pp. 21-22.
- (6) Ibid. (7) Ibid.
- (8) “Patience – the Art of Persevering” by F.B. Moyer.
- (9) *Perspektiven der Regula Benedicti* by A. Boeckmann,. p. 81. (10) Ibid.
- (11) Cf. Statio Conference on “Love” by M.J. Mananzan, *Conversatio* Jan.2011, # 1, vol XLI, p. 4.: (12) A. Boeckmann, *op. cit.*, .p. 81.

SOURCES

Basic Sources: *NRSV for Bible ref.*; *RB 1980 (in Latin and English) Collegeville, MN, 1981*; *Constitutions of the Congr. Of the MBS, 2nd Ed. 2002*

Other Sources, arranged as they appear:

1. “The Holy Spirit in Theology and Spirituality, by F. Gomez, St. Paul Publ., Makati, c. 2010.
2. “The Great Rush Forward” in The NY Times Supplement, 3/12/2011, pp. 1, 3 – ” *Forward*” (by A Patil)
3. *Don’t sweat the Small Stuff*” ...by R. Carlson , NY 1997, pp. 21-22.
4. “*Patience --, the Art of Persevering*” by F.B. Moyer
([http:// PatienceTheArtOfPreservingInThisLife.html](http://PatienceTheArtOfPreservingInThisLife.html))
5. *Perspektiven der Regula Benedicti* by A. Boeckmann,
Muensterschwarzach 1986.

Second Sunday in Lent (March 20 2011)

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

Psalm 22:23-31

Luke 13:31-35

One of the most striking images in the New Testament is the one Jesus uses here. Jesus is warned that he might be killed by Herod if he keeps doing what he's doing. Jesus then notes that he is not in Jerusalem yet, so it is not the place for him to die. Jerusalem is the Big Shot place, the home of the Temple and headquarters of the authorities, the ones who usually do such killings. (Keep in mind: that is where he ended up dying. But that is yet to come.)

Then, Jesus lets his emotions out. "How I'd love to gather you under My wings", He says, "but you would not be gathered." This is God the Mother Hen, trying to hide the chicks from the fox (the Herods of the world). Most sermons nowadays make so much of the feminine imagery,

though God is treated as Jerusalem's mother in Isaiah 66 -- or the image of God as a bird, though in Ezekiel 10, God's far from being as puny as a chicken.

Important as that is, the main thrust of Jesus' saying is not in the image of God he uses, it's in what the little chicks do. They refuse to be guarded. They won't stay under the wing! The result is that they will be left "desolate". Maybe the fox will have little chicken nuggets for lunch; or, they'll just get lost in the cold world and freeze or starve. Their survival depends on the mother hen, but these bird-brains want nothing of it !

Who scurries out from under the wing?

- Is it today's person, master builder of her/his own personal world by way of modern technology?
- is it the force-full, cocky macho street tough? Or perhaps those who love to fantasize about being one as they lay on the couch swilling beer and watching TV sports?
- is it the one who has the business cable channel on their TV at all times, in order not to miss the market move or inside tip that will make him/her a multi-millionaire?
- is it the church activist, bitter at the very idea of being tucked under the same wing as those they take to be their enemy, trying to push or pull them out from under the warmth of Christ's body?
- is it you and I when we want to keep power over our lives all to our selves, not giving it over to God, and not really letting the other chicks of the flock snuggle up close to us under God's wings?

We who think ourselves secure stop thinking that way when that which is bigger than us shows its force. Like, say, a hurricane and flood. Or an earthquake and tsunami. Or an economic downturn that leaves many -- perhaps even you? -- out of a house or a job, with no idea what's coming next. The world we create for ourselves gets shown to be a cartoon world, with liquid eraser dumped all over it. When that happens, many people scurry back to God, only to run away once the threat is gone. Keep in mind the lesson of the current hard times: God is there, and God cares, even when we think ourselves to be beyond danger's reach. Because God knows we aren't.

Lord, teach me to trust you and your love for me. Tuck me under your wings. Keep me safe from the foxes prowling in my life. Amen.

Bob Longman

A challenge: Most of us know at least one person or family who's lost much during the current economic upheavals. Think a moment about some way, small or large, in which you can lend a servant-hand to them. Then, *do it*.

Spirithome Lenten Devotionals