

The Third Sunday of Advent *December 15, 2019*

“Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.” (James 5:7)

There is a series of four Catholic devotionals (books for Christian living) composed in the 1400's by Thomas a Kempis entitled *“The Imitation of Christ”*. In the first book, *Useful Admonitions for the Spiritual Life*, Thomas wrote these words: ***“Learn how to be patient in enduring the faults of others, remembering that you yourself have many which others have to put up with”***. Using these words to guide our reflection, let us re-examine the value of patience (one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit) and how we can grow in patience throughout our daily life.

If we begin with a standard definition of patience found in the Catholic Dictionary, we would read: Patience is a fruit of the Holy Spirit which strengthens the soul to bear the trials of this life with resignation to God's will, instead of giving way to sadness. It is these last words, giving way to sadness, that so many of us struggle with. How often have you or I confessed a lack of patience toward another person or situation? Often, we beg God with these or similar words: Please, give me patience. Yet, our dear Lord does not *give* us patience. Instead, He allows us to experience events or encounter individuals which provide us with the opportunity to exercise patience. I want to stress the word *exercise* in relation to patience for if we consider patience to be akin to a muscle, then the more we exercise that particular muscle, the stronger the muscle can become.

Saint James, writing to encourage his flock to be patient, uses the familiar example of the farmer. The farmer, after preparing the ground for the plant, must wait allowing for the plant to grow. To a certain extent, the farmer is limited by the plant. He could try to speed up the process by providing extra fertilizer; however, he runs the risk of injuring the plant and stunting its growth. The plant must be allowed to grow during its own time and at its own speed. The same could be said concerning the raising of children. We can prepare them for as many of life's issues as we can think of, but they will have to grow and learn at their own pace.

The example of the farmer, by Saint James, is so very appropriate in the lives of many. And, the definition of patience from the Catholic Dictionary is tremendous. Yet, I would like to add one thing for us to reflect upon concerning patience. I think we should see patience as an act of Love. We love therefore we are patient. Please, let us not consider love in a generic sense, but see it lived in specific instances of life. A husband or wife who lovingly takes care of their sick and dying spouse is a testament to patience. They feed, bath, dress them, and sit up nights beside them because they love. Although they may be exhausted from their own daily work or dealing with an illness themselves, they do these things because they love. An adult child who takes care of their aging parent is patient because they love. I once heard a woman describe why she cared for her dying mother by simply stating: “She cared for me when I was a child, now I am so blessed to be able to return her love.” These are two of the many examples of loving patience that daily surround us. As we prepare for God's great gift of His Son this Christmas, let us thank Him for the many gifts of love we have been blessed with by becoming more loving, more patient, with whatever or whomever may walk into our lives today.