

Lent 2, 2017

“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification.” (1 Thessalonians 4.3)

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

We move this morning from the temptations of the Lord Jesus in last week’s Gospel to the testing of the woman of Canaan today, but there remains a common theme – patience. The word ‘patience’ comes from the Latin root ‘pati’ which means ‘to suffer’ or ‘to endure’. For this reason, the King James Version of the Bible uses the word ‘longsuffering’ in place of the word ‘patience’. That also explains why someone admitted to the hospital is called a ‘patient’ – a ‘sufferer’, and ‘endurer’.

The woman in this morning’s Gospel is exactly that – a sufferer, a patient. Her daughter was ‘grievously vexed with a devil’. The English Standard Version makes this translation: ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is *severely oppressed with a demon*’. We can only try to imagine the horrors this poor woman lived with daily: the screaming, the irrational out-bursts, the bullying, the hitting and spitting and cursing, and the sleepless nights. And so the Scripture says she *was crying* out these words: ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, my daughter is severely oppressed with a demon’.

But, curiously, Jesus ‘did not answer her a word’. In other words, He did not acknowledge her. The disciples took this as a sign of dismissal and they came and *begged* Jesus to send her away. ‘Send her away,’ they said ‘for she is crying after us’. Wow! How insensitive and cruel!

The Lord then interjected with a statement which seems somewhat off-handed and legalistic. He said, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’. In other words, ‘Lady I cannot help you because you are from outside my area of responsibility. You are a Canaanite and from the other side of the tracks’. And this is where we see true patience in action. In response to Jesus, she stepped forward and knelt before Him, saying, ‘Lord, help me’.

But again, Jesus seemed to put her off. He replied, ‘It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.’ In other words, ‘why should I waste my precious time with you?’ As bad as that response sounds, His motivation was good. This was a teaching moment and He wanted to highlight a heavenly virtue.

Having been 'stone-walled' for the fourth time, (and referred to as a dog) the woman of Canaan hung in and persisted. She did not kick dirt at Jesus, or swear at Him and walk away. No, she said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table'. What an answer! What a statement of faith! And that's exactly what Jesus was waiting for. So He exclaimed, 'O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.' And, as the Gospel says, 'Her daughter was healed instantly'. The violence stopped and there was peace. The raging was over and there was a great calm in that little girl's soul. Jesus brought about a powerful and undeniable transformation in her life through her mother's patience and faith, and He used the situation to teach His disciples.

And now, through this morning's Epistle, the Church calls us to consider the role of patience and longsuffering in our own lives. Writing to the Church in Thessalonica, St. Paul said, 'This is the will of God, even your sanctification'-- your being set apart for Him; your progress in holiness; your maturing in the way of Christ. He then goes on to warn the Christians about sexual immorality. 'Each one of you,' he said 'must know how to control his own body in holiness and honor'. We are not to be governed by our urges or feelings. We belong to Christ and His Spirit dwells in us. In our Baptism and Confirmation we promised to renounce the vain pomp and glory of the world with all its covetous desires, and the sinful desires of the flesh, and the Spirit of the Holy Trinity came to help us increase in patience and faith.

In John Bunyan's famous book, *Pilgrim's Progress*, there is a part where the main character, Christian, is encouraged to go to the Interpreter's House, for there he will be shown some excellent things. Upon his arrival, the Interpreter takes Christian on a tour, and uses certain rooms in the house as object lessons. In the third room, Christian observes two boys as they react to the wishes of their Governor: their names are Passion and patience. Passion is very discontent, but Patience is calm and quiet. The Governor wants them to wait for His (the Governor's) best things. Passion refuses to wait, but Patience trusts the word of the Governor and is content. Here's a brief excerpt:

"The Interpreter took him by the hand, and had him into a little room, where sat two little children, each one in his chair. The name of the eldest was Passion, of the other Patience. Passion seemed to be much discontent, but Patience was very

quiet. Then Christian asked, 'What is the reason of the discontent of Passion?' The Interpreter answered, 'The Governor of them would have him stay for his best things, 'till the beginning of the next year; but he will have all now: But Patience is willing to wait'.

Then I saw that one came to Passion, and brought him a bag of Treasure, and poured it down at his feet; the which he took up and rejoiced therein, and withall laughed Patience to scorn: But I beheld but a while, and he had lavished all away, and had nothing left him but rags."

As the Rev. Ken Puls, an American Baptist Minister says, "Passion represents those of this world who live only for the here and now. Just as Passion rejects the word of the Governor, the world is unwilling to believe God's Word. Patience depicts those who have had their hearts conquered by grace and subdued by God's Spirit. Patience is content to wait for the best things, things that are lasting and eternal. Those who are spiritually minded can endure the trials of this life with joy, because they know the best is yet to come".

Pastor Puls then goes on to underline the connection between patience or longsuffering, and our sanctification or spiritual development. He says, "Our culture has lost touch with patience. We want everything now and with the least possible effort. While past generations worked months to grow their own food and spent hours preparing a meal, we stand in front of our microwave ovens saying: "Come on! Hurry up!" But with God time is precious and useful. He delights in taking time in working out His purposes. *Patience is an essential element of our sanctification.* Although we are (regenerated and) declared righteous...the moment we trust in Christ (and are baptized) -- on the basis of His righteousness given to us -- sanctification, growing in grace and being conformed to Christ's image, takes time. We will be pursuing holiness for the rest of our lives, as we wait for the day when we will be glorified, when we see our Savior face to face."

We saw patience (longsuffering) in last Sunday's Gospel as the Lord Jesus refused to snap His fingers and make rocks into bread. He was willing to submit His will to His Father's and wait. In this morning's Gospel, we are shown patience again in the woman of Canaan. Her suffering, like Jesus' suffering in the wilderness for

forty days, was intense and real. Nevertheless, she waited on the Lord and trusted in Him.

This kind of trust and longsuffering is, as Pastor Puls says, essential to our sanctification. We will not be able to grow in grace and holiness; we will not be able to draw closer to the Lord; and we will not be able to really desire or do His will if we follow our every urge, feeling, whim or compulsion. There is a submission which must be made – a decision – by every one of us. Will I follow the Lord Jesus Christ and give my life to Him, or will I follow my own path? The choices are set out for us in the two boys in the Interpreter's house, Passion and Patience.

There is no doubt that following Christ is like swimming against the current of our culture. Our culture is largely determined by popular opinion and human desire. But we belong to God. We have been regenerated and given new life through the Death and Resurrection of our Saviour, and by the gift of the Spirit. Like Patience in Pilgrim's Progress, we believe that this world is only temporary and the best is yet to come.... And so, as we wait, we ask the Lord to keep us and protect us, both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls. And, He will.

And now unto God Almighty: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost be ascribed all majesty, honour, dominion, power and glory forever and ever. Amen.