



Patience

THE PATH TO VICTORY

*Pointers for
Accomplishing One's
Mission in Life*

CHARLES BELMONTE

Table of Contents

[Preface](#)

- [1. The Place of Patience in Christian Life](#)
- [2. Patience in Sacred Scripture](#)
- [3. St Cyprian of Carthage: The Good of Patience](#)
- [4. St Augustine: Patience](#)
- [5. Pope St Gregory the Great: The Patience of Job](#)
- [6. Our Lord's Patience](#)
- [7. The Patience of the Mother of God](#)
- [8. Abandonment to God's Will](#)
- [9. Patience and Long-Suffering](#)
- [10. Patience and Interior Struggle](#)
- [11. Patience and Fortitude](#)
- [12. Patience and Charity](#)
- [13. Patience in the Apostolate](#)
- [14. Difficulties](#)
- [15. Patience in Economic Downfall](#)
- [16. Serenity](#)

Patience:
The Path to Victory

Pointers for Accomplishing One's
Mission in Life

Charles Belmonte

Copyright (C) 1994 by THE AUTHOR
NIHIL OBSTAT: Msgr. Benedicto S. Aquino
Vice-Chancellor
IMPRIMATUR: +Jaime L. Cardinal Sin
Archbishop of Manila
ISBN

Nada te turbe,
Nada te espante,
Todo se pasa,
Dios no se muda,
La paciencia
Todo lo alcanza;
Quien a Dios tiene
Nada le falta.
Sólo Dios basta.

Let nothing trouble you,
Let nothing scare you,
All is fleeting, [All things pass]
God is unchanging.
Patience
Gains everything.
He who possesses God

Lacks nothing.
God alone suffices.

St Teresa of Avila

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Preface](#)

Part One

THE THEOLOGY OF PATIENCE

[1. The Place of Patience in Christian Life](#)

[2. Patience in Sacred Scripture](#)

Part Two

THREE DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH SPEAK ON PATIENCE

[3. St Cyprian of Carthage: The Good of Patience](#)

[4. St Augustine: Patience](#)

[5. Pope St Gregory the Great: The Patience of Job](#)

Part Three

POINTERS ON PATIENCE

[6. Our Lord's Patience](#)

[7. The Patience of the Mother of God](#)

[8. Abandonment to God's Will](#)

[9. Patience and Long-Suffering](#)

[10. Patience and Interior Struggle](#)

[11. Patience and Fortitude](#)

[12. Patience and Charity](#)

[13. Patience in the Apostolate](#)

[14. Difficulties](#)

[15. Patience in Economic Downfall](#)

[16. Serenity](#)

Preface

Every man is a wayfarer travelling to his final destination. When you reach yours, you will have succeeded. In the title of this book I mention *victory*; I hope you get some ideas from this book that will help you to reach that destination. But real victory or success has nothing to do with

material achievements: what you gain in life or accomplish yourself. Success is what you do for others, what you do for God.

I allude to a *path* in the title of the book. You don't accomplish your mission in life by just turning on a switch; you don't succeed by merely making the right decision once in your life time. That is the mistake of those who choose-Jesus-as-my Savior and forget about him or their neighbor afterward, of those worried about choosing the right husband or wife, or professional orientation as if were the end of their struggle. Victory is at the top of a tall building. And there is no elevator to victory; you will have to take the stairs, step by step.

The victory you try to get will come only after a path. You will find difficulties, but remember, in this life, like in sports, one loss does not make a season. You must go along a long drive strewn with hopes and fears, satisfactions and disappointments, joys and suffering. You will tread that path going through each of these elements. Yet, you must set your eyes in the final goal, reject any sadness resulting from these hardships, and continue fighting. When you do that, you are living the virtue of *patience*.

Everybody goes through bad times in life. Some end up *bitter*, you, with patience, should get *better*.

You will find in this book guidance from many persons who went (or are still going) through obstacles similar to yours. Their suggestions and encouragement will help you to go on, without hurry, without pause, without flagging down in the struggle to reach your destination.

This is not a book to be read through once; it is to be taken over and over again. It is a book for daily reflective and meditative prayer. It is a daily companion that will support your effort to acquire solid virtue.

But first invoke the Holy Spirit. Ask him to make you understand his words, notice his touches, and follow his mysterious ways. Then read, reflect, move on, and continue your conversation with God daily.

At the end you may see light, and that light will lead you to God who is Truth and Love.

PART ONE
THE THEOLOGY OF PATIENCE

The Place of Patience in Christian Life

One Will always Encounter Trials in Life

Writing Timothy from his prison in Rome where he will soon suffer martyrdom, the Apostle St Paul warns his disciple that “everyone who wants to live a holy life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12). In the same letter he points out, “I am already poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure” (2 Tim 4:6). And he adds with holy pride, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim 4:7).

St Paul was thus advising his disciple on an ordinary occurrence in the life of a Christian: trials. Christ himself had prepared the apostles: “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33).

In spite of his own weaknesses and the opposition from without, a Christian enters the daily struggle *full of joy*, not passive or frightened; he considers himself a winner in Christ. Thus, St James bids, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops patience. Patience perfects the work [of God] so that you may become mature and complete, not lacking anything” (Jas 1:2-4).

What Is Patience?

When we hear about patience, we usually think of one of those situations that get into our nerves: “I really have to be patient with this person.” We are thinking of patience as some sort of *control over the irritation and anger* we experience when we face people who do something wrong or inconvenient for us. In sum, we think of patience as some sort of serenity: the power of enduring trouble, suffering, and inconvenience, without complaining.

Or we might think of patience as some capacity *to bear the delay of goods* which do not come as fast as we would like: “I have to be patient before I save enough to buy a car.” This notion refers to the capacity to bear sacrifices for a long time until we attain a certain joy. Patience here appears as the ability to wait for results, to deal with problems without haste.

False Attitudes to Suffering

Certain serene attitudes towards suffering are not to be confused with the genuine virtue of patience.

The *stoic* attitude is one of endurance but only because it considers suffering inescapable no matter what you may do.

The *Buddhist* attitude is one of eliminating suffering by killing any desire and thus any frustration or suffering.

The attitude of *apathetic inertia* is that of the lukewarm person who prefers to remain in his situation because he thinks that any change will demand some effort or that he might end up in a worse situation.

Besides, we find an array of attitudes that are products of too much love of comfort or laziness. Instead of abandoning oneself to God's providence, the person merely waits for the suitable moment to seek revenge or his own personal affirmation. In these cases, egoism and pride have taken the place of humility, the characteristic of true patience.

These and other attitudes lack something to make them virtuous –the subject does not endure suffering for the sake of an objective good, which is the goal of any virtue.

Patience as a Human Virtue

From a human–purely ethical–point of view, patience is necessary for any person; it seems logical that we should bear difficulties to compensate for the evil we have done. But this motive is not all about patience.

We read in the Book of Proverbs that “better a patient son than a strong one, and he that is master of his will is better than he who is the conqueror of nations” (Prov 16,32). Here patience is related to self control and will power.

Definitively, patience has to do with suffering. If we want to advance a definition of it as a human virtue (that is, without any relation to God or the influence of his grace in our life), we could say that patience is the capacity or habit of enduring evil, adversity, or pain with fortitude. In fact, the classics place patience as part of the virtue of fortitude.

Fortitude is the human virtue that controls the negative emotions of despair, fear, and anger enabling the person to continue the pursuit of a difficult good even when facing the greatest dangers to bodily life. Patience, related to fortitude, is the virtue that *adds serenity to the soul* in order to control the emotions of discouragement, sadness, and irritation in the face of persistent or lasting evil. We have then two elements that define patience: the lasting or persistent presence of suffering (which is also proper to fortitude), and the serenity to endure it without giving up or getting angry.

The Christian Virtue of Patience

So much for the human virtue of patience. Now, what is characteristic of Christian patience? What is specific in Christian patience comes,

- from the kind of evil that is endured,
- from the power used to endure and,
- from the motivation of the person enduring evil.

i) the kind of evil

The human virtue of patience encounters suffering as anything contrary to one's liking. Christian patience faces the suffering that comes from being or acting as a genuine Christian or any other suffering which may come along our way to heaven.

ii) the power

St Paul tells us that patience is a fruit of the Holy Spirit maintaining a special relationship with hope and charity (cf. Gal 5:22; Rom 8:25; 1 Cor 13:4). In human patience we rely on sheer will power or self-control of negative emotions to overcome difficulties. A person moved by Christian patience relies also on the power of God's grace. This kind of patience appears as a supernatural power from Christ to take with serenity whatever long suffering may come or be demanded in order to accept or carry out the will of God.

Patience, as a supernatural virtue, proceeds from charity; thus, it is not merely a passive disposition: not to react, to hold it. Real patience is more than that, it is to accept God's will and God's ways, no matter what happens.

iii) the motivation

A person endowed with human patience is motivated by the hope of obtaining a certain natural good or joy; he wants to "succeed," to get what he likes. All these are human motives. The three theological virtues, faith, hope and charity motivate Christian patience. The person wants to please God and attain Him or his blessings; he seeks union with Christ the Redeemer, and together with Him wants to overcome the effects of sin in oneself and in the others.

After these considerations we may state the definition of Christian patience. Patience, a part of the virtue of fortitude, is **the virtue that enables a person to bear physical and moral sufferings, trying circumstances, and obstinate personalities without sadness of spirit or dejection of heart, but with equanimity born of love of God.**

The Need for Christian Patience

Any person needs human patience to get to the good things one wants. We need the Christian virtue of patience to attain our supernatural goal. A Christian person may reason out and apply a parallel logic of facts: Things were not easy for Christ, and his disciples; things may not come easy for me either.

To develop the habit of prayer and contemplative life an ordinary Christian may have to persevere through years of ascetical struggle.

To help others to be good Christians (this is apostolate), he will have to go through periods of time without getting full response.

Again, like any other man, a Christian will be tempted in different ways and he may fall repeatedly; he will need patience to avoid sadness or anger and to endure the recurring temptation of giving up his efforts to become a better Christian and a saint.

Why has Christianity always set forward a life of renunciation, mortification, self-denial, patience, which looks negative? Simply because the message of salvation of Christ, centered on the Cross and his Resurrection, demands so.

Besides the human motive—for a man of faith—patience has necessarily another, more important, supernatural motive: to atone with Christ accompanying him in his sufferings for all mankind; thus, a Christian gains more supernatural merit.

The practice of the virtue of patience will originate abundant mortifications; these mortifications performed out of love of God will make the person humble, patient, and very united to God.

The Enemies of Patience

From the analysis above we gather that patience has to do with pursuing a good and enduring suffering in the process. We can see now that the enemies of patience are basically two: (a) falling into discouragement and sadness, or (b) falling into anger. By the first we stop from pursuing the good, by the second we try to get rid of a necessary suffering in the wrong way.

In pursuing the good, man has to face the three enemies of the soul: the devil, the world, and the flesh. Thus, facing failure, one needs the virtue of patience to react at once against sadness, and avoid drifting with discouragement. Sadness may result from a total lack of stability in facing difficulties. This spiritual depression is a kind of impatience; it is followed by resentment manifested in words and in deeds.

A person may also respond to a present evil by over-reacting and getting angry with everyone; anger is another outlet for impatience. Impatience triumphs when we allow the trials of everyday life to dominate us; thus, we resort to grumbling, complaining, constant bickering, and to fits of bad temper.

Degrees of Patience

We can distinguish five main stages in a person who is growing in the virtue of patience:

i) *Resignation* without complaint or impatience with respect to the crosses that the Lord sends us or permits us to endure.

ii) *Peace and serenity* in the face of affliction, without the sadness or depression that sometimes accompany mere resignation.

iii) *Acceptance* of God's will and God's ways, which lead us to desire and accept whatever cross comes our way.

iv) *Total and complete joy* for being associated with God in the mystery of the Cross.

v) *The folly of the Cross*, which made St Paul feel strong in his suffering while preaching Christ crucified; what looks as foolishness to men, is really the wisdom of God:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God... Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to Gentiles but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength (1 Cor 1:18.22-25).

For this reason a Christian may prefer pain to pleasure and place his delight in external or internal suffering by which one is configured with Christ.

How to Grow in Patience

As with any other supernatural virtue, we need the light and power of grace along with our human effort to grow in patience. We can mention some specific ways of prayer that combine God's grace and human effort.

Aside from *prayer of petition*, we need *meditative prayer* used in specific ways. The so-called prayer of serenity combines both. In the face of a persistent suffering we need to discern with the Lord whether He wants us to change or solve the cause of it or, rather, to accept it; this is meditative prayer. Then we have to ask the Lord either courage to change the cause or patience to endure the suffering we cannot change.

In the case of persons who resist our efforts to help them change, we need also *reflective prayer* on the meaning of Christian suffering and how to go about it. This we do by reading and reflecting on God's patience with sinners, on the life, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We also learn from other scriptural passages and from the writings and lives of the saints and other Christian authors.

The rest of this book is a collection of writings that will help us to effect that kind of reflective and prayerful reading.

Hopefully, the prayerful reader will grow from simple acceptance or resignation of sufferings up to the folly of the Cross –that of rejoicing with the Lord Jesus in his work of salvation.

2

Patience in Sacred Scripture

Sacred Scripture gives countless examples of patience and meekness. The following passages will help us to reflect.

King David had to face the rebellion of Absalom, his son. His armies were losing terrain, and he had to escape from Jerusalem. Instead of getting sad or angry at the insults hurled at him, King David accepted them as coming from God.

The king set out, with all the people following him, and they halted at a place some distance away. The king set out, with his entire household following him.

The whole countryside wept aloud as all the people passed by. The king also crossed the Kidron Valley, and all the people moved on toward the desert. But David continued up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went; his head was covered and he was barefoot. All the people with him covered their heads too and were weeping as they went up.

As King David approached Bahurim, a man from the same clan as Saul's family came out from there. His name was Shimei son of Gera, and he cursed as he came out. He pelted David and all the king's officials with stones, though all the troops and the special guard were on David's right and left. As he cursed, Shimei said, "Get out, get out, you man of blood, you scoundrel! The Lord has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The Lord has handed the kingdom over to your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a man of blood!"

Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and cut off his head."

But the king said, "What do you and I have in common, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the Lord said to him, 'Curse David,' who can ask, 'Why do you do this?'" David then said to Abishai and all his officials, "My son, who is of my own flesh, is trying to take my life. How much more, then, this Benjamite! Leave him alone; let him curse, for the Lord has told him to. It may be that the Lord will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today."

So David and his men continued along the road while Shimei was going along the hillside opposite him, cursing as he went and throwing

stones at him and showering him with dirt. The king and all the people with him arrived at their destination exhausted. And there he refreshed himself. (2 Sam 15-17 - 16:14)

In the Book of Job, Scripture gives an example of a just man who suffered tribulation and endured it with edifying patience. In this book, the question of patience in suffering finds its most vivid expression. Job, an image of our Lord Jesus Christ, shows us the reactions of a patient man when facing trials in life.

Job was a “perfect and upright man, one who feared God and eschewed evil.” This just man, without any fault of his own, is tried by seemingly endless sufferings. He loses his possessions, his sons and daughters, and finally he himself is afflicted by a grave disease.

The essential merit of the drama enacted around Job is that it faces the problem squarely. By human calculation the vicissitudes which he suffers are wholly unjust and inappropriate. The Book of Job does not offer any easy solution, but depicts the holy fortitude that the man of God exhibits in his humiliation.

Job’s patience encourages and comforts any individual or group to bear anything for God’s sake in time of bereavement or oppression.¹

The sapiential books of the Old Testament describe the distinctive behavior of a patient man:

I waited patiently for the Lord;
he turned to me and heard my cry. (Ps 40:1)
When anxiety was great within me,
your consolation, Lord, brought joy to my soul.
(Ps 94:19)

Woe to me that I dwell in Meshech,
that I live among the tents of Kedar!
Too long have I lived among those who hate peace.
I am a man of peace;
but when I speak, they are for war. (Ps 120:5-7)

The bad tempered man provokes disputes,
the patient man allays dissension. (Prov 15:18)
Better a patient man than a warrior,
a man who controls his temper,
than one who takes a city. (Prov 16:32)

A patient man will stand firm till the time comes,

but his joy will break out in the end. (Sir 1:29)
My son, if you aspire to serve the Lord,
prepare yourself for temptation.
Be sincere of heart, be steadfast,
and do not be alarmed when disaster comes.
Cling to him and do not leave him,
so that you may be honored at the end of your days.
Whatever happens to you, accept it,
and in the uncertainties of your humble state,
be patient,
since gold is tested with fire,
and chosen men in the crucible of humiliation.

(Sir 2:1-5)

My son, when you are ill, do not be impatient,
but pray to the Lord and he will heal you. (Sir 38:9)

The passages of “the Servant of God” of the Book of Isaiah prophesy the patience and endurance of the Redeemer. Here are some of them:

He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. (Is 42:2)

The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back. I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. (Is 50:5-6)

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. (Is 53:7)

In the New Testament, Jesus, God and Man, is the ultimate model of patience. Especially in the sufferings of his Passion and Cross, he gives us the ideal for every Christian.²

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Mt 11:29)

He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. (Mt 12:19-20)

Say to the Daughter of Zion, “See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (Mt 21:5)

After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

(John 13:5)

Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. (John 13:14)

Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. Jesus replied, "Friend, do what you came for." (Mt 26:49-50)

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward and declared, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'" Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" But Jesus remained silent. (Mt 26:59-63)

When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked him, "Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?" But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor. (Mt 27:12-14)

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. (Lk 23:34)

Our Lord also taught us with parables to live patience in specific situations. The parable of the Unmerciful Servant shows us the contrast between the king's conduct and his servant's. It teaches us to be merciful with all, as God is merciful with us.³

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

The servant fell on his knees before him. "Be patient with me," he begged, "and I will pay back everything." The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt, and let him go.

But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. "Pay back what you owe me!" he demanded.

His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, "Be patient with me, and I will pay you back." But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

Then the master called the servant in. “You wicked servant,” he said, “I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart. (Mt 18:23-35)

By your patience you will win your souls. (Lk 21:19)

For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. (Lk 22:27)

Patience and long-suffering were characteristics of the early Christians, as St Paul shows.

We even rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that such sufferings produce patience—proven virtue—and patience, hope. (Rom 5:3-4)

Love is patient. (1 Cor 13:4)

We prove we are servants of God by great patience in times of suffering; in times of hardship and distress; when we are flogged, or sent to prison, or mobbed; laboring, sleepless, starving. We prove we are God’s servants by our purity, knowledge, patience, and kindness. (2 Cor 6:4-6)

By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am “timid” when face to face with you, but “bold” when away! (2 Cor 10:1)

As a prisoner of the Lord, I urge you to live a life worthy of your vocation. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in charity. (Eph 4:1)

Jesus made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a Cross! (Phil 2:7-8)

We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. (1 Thes 2:7)

No one should be shaken by trials. You know quite well that these are bound to come our way. (1 Thes 3:3)

Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. (2 Thes 1:4)

You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance. (2 Tim 3:10)

At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. (2 Tim 4:16)

In the following verses, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells the Christians that there should be no relaxation, but zeal for the full realization of their hope to the very end. Thus, they shall escape that dull sluggishness and imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promise. Note the mention of all the three theological virtues and the special mention of patience, which is the moral strength of hope.

We want each of you to show this same charity and diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. (Heb 6:11-12)

A Christian should remember his days of fervor; this is a most powerful antidote against relaxation in his daily struggle.

The early Christians had "endured a great contest of sufferings" and proved themselves good spiritual athletes. Nevertheless, they could have gone through some discouragement. Pain, shame, persecution, and spoliation fell to their lot—in the days of Stephen, for example.

In those circumstances, courage and confidence in God must not be thrown away; patience is necessary for one to keep doing God's will and thus secure salvation.

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.

You need patience so that when you have done the Will of God, you will receive what he has promised. (Heb 10:32-36)

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the Cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured

such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Heb 12:2-3)

The Apostle St James teaches us to be patient and to endure present difficulties.

The opening paragraph of St James's letter shows the anxiety of the writer for the faithful under trial. Aware that their faith is being put to the test by manifold afflictions, he bids them to look upon themselves as blessed when they suffer persecution for justice' sake. For the time of trial is a training school on which lessons of endurance, constancy, and solid virtue are effectively taught.

Men of strong faith will stand firm in times of affliction when weaker brethren falter and give way. Patient endurance tends to purify the soul, to sanctify and perfect it. A soul is perfected by the removal of everything contrary to the love of God.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops patience. Patience perfects the work [of God] so that you may become mature and complete, not lacking anything." (Jas 1:2-4)

The poor man who patiently endures poverty resembles his divine Lord, who promised eternal life to the poor in spirit. Thus, is he exalted above his low condition. The climax of this section on the value of trials is reached in the reward promised to the man who remains steadfast. With character matured, virtue perfected, and the love of God fully tested by trials patiently endured, the victor's crown of eternal glory will be his according to God's promise.

The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business. (Jas 1:9-11)

The victims of injustice, and all who suffer the trials of life, are now exhorted to wait with trustful patience and submission for the arrival of the day of deliverance, termed "the day of the coming of the Lord." The reference seems to be to the coming of the Son of Man about which the disciples asked Christ on Mount Olivet.

The prophecy uttered on that occasion was partly fulfilled when the Romans captured Jerusalem and destroyed the Jewish temple. The complete fulfillment must await the day of the final judgment, when all wrong will be righted, all patient endurance rewarded.

St James summons the Christians, "Don't grumble against each other, brothers," for that would be yielding to impatience and irritability, and might lead to recriminations and rash judgments, thus meriting a severe sentence from the Judge, who is so near that he seems to be standing at the door.

Be patient, brothers, until the Lord's coming. Think of a farmer; how patiently he waits for the land to yield the precious fruit and how patient he is for the autumn and the spring rains.

Be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. (Jas 5:7-11)

The early Christians suffered trials of various kinds, for justice' sake. They were attacked for the name of Christ and slandered as criminals. Slaves suffered at the hands of their masters. The persecution was severe and widespread, but unofficial and spasmodic.

In his first letter, the Apostle St Peter offers words of consolation and encouragement to these sufferers. Since they were in danger of yielding under the strain of calumny and violence, the example of the suffering Christ is set before them (2:21), by whose blood they were ransomed (1:19), by whose resurrection God regenerated them, and destines them for eternal glory. Accordingly, they are urged to bear their sufferings patiently (2:18; 3:14; 4:13). Every Christian must practice virtue, submission to authority, charity, vigilance, and humility.

For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. (1 Pet 2:19)

But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. (1 Pet 2:20)

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. (1 Pet 2:21)

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. (1 Pet 2:23)

Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. (1 Pet 2:18)

But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.” (1 Pet 3:14)

But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. (1 Pet 4:13)

Toward their pagan neighbors who view them with suspicion, and hostility, Christians must adopt an attitude of nonresistance and bear evil patiently, without retaliating. Not even returning good for evil, but blessings for curses.

Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. (1 Pet 3:9)

In his second letter, St Peter calls for self-control and patience, i.e., endurance of trials and sufferings with resignation. One who has reached this stage of perfection is endowed with “piety” or “godliness,” i.e. perfect conformity to God’s will.

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, patience; and to patience, piety; and to piety, fraternal love; and to fraternal love, charity. (2 Pet 1:5-7)

The Archangel St Michael and the churches of Ephesus and Thyatira are praised for their patience.

But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!” (Jude 1:9)

[To the church of Ephesus] I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. (Apoc 2:2-3)

[To the church of Thyatira] I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. (Apoc 2:19)

Footnotes:

¹See in p. 000 the comments of St Gregory the Great and Pope John Paul II on the Book of Job.

²See more on Our Lord's patience in p. 000.

³See St John Chrysostom's comments on this parable in p. 000, *An Eye for an Eye?*

PART TWO
THREE DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH
SPEAK ON PATIENCE

3

The Good of Patience

by St Cyprian of Carthage

St Cyprian was born in Carthage (present day Tunis in North Africa) around the year 200, and became its bishop. He was a staunch defender of the faith and ecclesiastical discipline.

In developing the theme of his famous work “The Good of Patience,” St Cyprian follows his usual scheme: quotation from Scripture, commentary on it, and application of the lesson to the present circumstances.

He suffered martyrdom during the persecution of Emperor Valerian in the year 254.

Patience, a Critical Weapon for the Struggle

1 In speaking of patience, beloved brethren, and in preaching on its benefits, I begin by requesting your patience. Patience is necessary for you to be able to listen to me now; you could not listen and learn without this virtue. The word of God, the way of salvation, is effectively learned only if one listens with patience to what is being said.

We Christians must be subject to the precepts of the Lord with an obedient zeal and personal commitment. The Lord wants us to be consistent with our faith and hope; thus, we should struggle throughout our lives to make these virtues a reality.

Thus, among all the weapons available for the struggle, I do not find any other more preferable, more useful for life, or more vital for attaining glory, than patience.

Christian Patience and Pagan Patience

St Cyprian establishes the difference between the pagan concept of patience and the Christian view of it. For a Christian, patience has its origin in God.

2 Pagan scholars declare that they also pursue this virtue, but their patience is as false as their wisdom. For how can anyone be wise and patient unless he knows that wisdom and patience come from God?

God himself warns us against those who think that they are wise in this world: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the prudence of the

prudent I will reject” (1 Cor 1:19).

The blessed Apostle Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, was sent to call and form the Gentiles in the faith. He declares: “Make sure that no one traps you and deprives you of your freedom by some secondhand, empty, rational philosophy based on the principles of this world instead of on Christ. For in Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead” (Col 2:8-9). And he says in another place: “Let no one deceive himself. If anyone thinks he is wise, let him become foolish in the eyes of this world so that he may become wise; for the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight. It is written, ‘The Lord knows wise men’s thoughts; he knows how useless they are;’ and again, ‘God knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are foolish’” (1 Cor 3:18-19). If their wisdom is false, their patience is also false.

A humble and meek person is also patient. We see that the pagan scholars are not humble or meek, but very indulgent with themselves; they displease God by the very fact that they please themselves. It is evident that patience cannot be found together with the arrogant boldness of a false freedom, or the shameless boasting of a proud scholar.

The Source of Patience

3 We, however, beloved brethren, are wise not in words but in deeds. We show our wisdom not by academic gown, but by truth. We know about virtues by practicing them, not by boasting of them. We do not merely speak of great things, but, rather, live them.

As servants and worshippers of God, we owe him this tribute: To show in our conduct the patience we learn from his teachings. Yes, we have this virtue in common with God. Patience has its beginnings in God; he is absolutely patient. God plants patience in our soul, increases it, and makes it gain splendor and dignity. God is its source and author.

Man should love a quality so dear to God. The Divine Majesty recommends us this good which he loves. If God is our Master and our Father, let us imitate his patience; a servant must be obedient to his master, and a son must be worthy of his father.

How Patient Is God?

4 How immense and remarkable is the patience of God! He patiently endures the pagan temples, earthly idols, and idolatrous rites that have been set up by men; these are an insult to God’s majesty and honor.

God makes the day to rise, and the sun to shine equally over the good and the evil. When he waters the earth with showers, no one is excluded

from his benefits; he bestows his rains without distinction on the just and the unjust.

We see that God uses an equal patience toward the guilty and the innocent, the religious and the materialistic, the grateful and the ungrateful. At God's Will, the seasons obey and the elements serve, the winds blow, the fountains flow, the fields offer grain in abundance, the fruits of the vines ripen, the trees are laden with fruit, the groves become green, and the meadows burst into flower.

Although God is provoked by frequent—yes—even continual offenses, he tempers his anger and patiently waits for the day of reckoning, which he has long scheduled. Although immediate vengeance is in his power, he prefers to be long-suffering and compassionate. He waits for man to stop his long course of malice, if it is at all possible. However deeply one is infected with the diseases of error and crime, God waits for man to change, at some time, and be converted to Him, even at a late hour.

“I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!” (Ez 18:32). And again: “Return to the Lord your God, for he is all tenderness and compassion, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity” (Joel 2:13).

The blessed apostle Paul calls back the sinner to penance by reminding him: “Are you abusing his abundant goodness, patience and tolerance, not realizing that this goodness of God is meant to lead you to repentance? Your stubborn refusal to repent is only adding to the anger God will have towards you on that day of anger, when his just judgments will be made known. He will repay each one as his works deserve” (Rom 2:4-6).

He says that the judgment of God is just, because it is delayed; it is postponed for a long time, so that care and thought may be taken for man's eternal life by the long enduring patience of God. Punishment is finally paid by the unfaithful and the sinner when there is no longer possibility of repentance of the sin.

Attain Our Goal by Imitating God's Patience

5 By revealing the divine wisdom, and by giving salutary precepts, the Lord instructed his disciples to live a holy life. He placed patience among the attributes of God, and proclaimed that whoever is gentle, patient, and meek imitates God the Father. Thus, patience was noted as necessary to reach perfection.

To illuminate this more fully, beloved brethren, the Lord made this pronouncement: “You have heard that it was said: ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor and shalt hate thy enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be the children of your Father in heaven, who makes the sun to rise on the good and evil and sends rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward shall you have? Do not even the Gentiles do that? You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:43-48).

He said it. If the patience of God the Father abides in us, if this aspect of divine likeness which Adam lost by his sin shines in our actions, we, the children of God, are made perfect. By patience we are restored to life—a heavenly birth; and by patience we will attain our goal.

It is glorious to become like God. It is wonderful and delightful to possess virtues similar to the divine attributes.

Jesus’ Patience

After explaining the origin of Christian patience, Cyprian shows how Christ and the saints lived this virtue.

6 Jesus Christ, our Lord and God, said that he came down to do the Will of his Father (cf. Jn 6:38); he gave proof of his divine nature and filiation by showing his abundance of majesty, power, and virtue. Among these virtues, Jesus embodied and exemplified his Father’s patience by his habitual self-control. He did not teach patience by words only; he taught it also by deeds.

From the outset of his coming from the sublimity of heaven to the earth, Jesus’ every act was marked by an accompanying patience:

- Though he was the Son of God, Jesus did not disdain to put on man’s flesh; though he was not a sinner, he bore the sins of others (1 Pet 2:24);

- Having put aside his immortality for a time, he became mortal to be slain for the salvation of the guilty, though he was innocent (cf. Mt 1:21);

- Though destined to grant the remission of sins, the Lord was baptized by his servant, and had his own body cleansed with the water of regeneration (Mt 3:13);

- He, who feeds us all, fasted for forty days; he who felt hunger, fills with the Bread of heaven those hungry for the word of God and grace;

- The Lord was engaged in conflict with the devil, who tempted him, but, having vanquished so formidable an enemy, he did not carry the fight

beyond words (Mt 4:1);

- Jesus did not rule over his disciples as a master rules over his slaves, but, being kind and gentle, he loved them as a brother;

- Being such a Master to his servants, he even deigned to wash the feet of his apostles; thus, he taught them what attitude a servant should have toward his companions (Jn 13:1 ff);

- We should not wonder, then, how he tolerated Judas, even to the end, with enduring patience. Our Lord knew who was the foe within the household, but ate with him, and did not expose him (Jn 13:2); he did not even refuse the kiss of his betrayer (Mt 26:48);

- Our Lord showed a marvelous equanimity in bearing with the Jews, and an amazing patience in persuading the unbelieving to accept the faith;

- Jesus won the ungrateful by kindness, responded gently to those who contradicted him, endured the proud with patience, yielded with humility to persecutors, wished to win over the murderers of the prophets, and those persistently rebellious against God even up to the very hour of his passion and Cross.

7 In the hour of his passion and Cross, before his jailers came to the cruel act of his slaughter and the shedding of his blood, our Lord listened to their violent abuses with patience and endured their shameful insults.

- The Lord was even covered with spittle by his torturers (Mt 26:67), though, shortly before, he had cured the eyes of the blind man with his own spittle (Mk 8:23);

- He suffered the lash, though, in his name, his servants now scourge the devil and the damned angels (Jn 19:1);

- He was crowned with thorns, though he now crowns the martyrs with eternal laurels (Mt 27:29);

- He was beaten in the face with hostile palms, though he now gives true palms to the victors (Mt 26:67);

- He was stripped of his garments, though he clothes all others with the garment of immortality (Jn 19:23);

- He was fed with gall, though he now gives us the food of heaven (Mt 27:34);

- He was given vinegar to drink, though he now offers us the cup of salvation (Lk 23:36);

- He was counted among criminals, though he is the innocent, the just, nay, Innocence Itself and Justice Itself (Mt 27:38);

- He was accused by false witnesses, though he is Truth.

He who is to judge was judged, and the Word of God, silent, was led to the Cross. The stars were confounded at the crucifixion of the Lord, the elements were disturbed, the earth trembled, night blotted out the day (Mt 27:45), the sun withdrew its rays and eyes lest it be forced to gaze upon the crime of the Jews, yet Jesus did not speak, move, or proclaim his majesty, even during the suffering itself. He endured all things even to the end with constant perseverance; a full and perfect patience found in him its realization.

8 After such sufferings, Jesus still receives sinners—his murderers—if they are converted and come to him. With the same patience he used to redeem man, this kind Master offers salvation to all; he closes his Church to no one. He receives those adversaries, those blasphemers, those persistent enemies of his name, provided they do penance for their offense, provided they acknowledge the crime committed. He does not only receive and pardon, but admits them to the reward of the kingdom of heaven.

Who can be more patient, who more kind? Even those who caused the blood of Christ to flow are given life by the blood of Christ. Such is the wonderful patience of Christ.

And look at the results; because of Christ's patience with sinners and persecutors, the Church now has Paul as a great Apostle.

A Christian Must Live as Jesus Did

If Christ is the model of patience, every Christian must imitate this aspect of the Master.

9 Beloved brethren, let us follow in the footsteps of Christ. If we are in Christ, if we put him on, if we are identified with him, if he himself is our way of salvation, let us be consistent and live as he did. John the Apostle teaches so: "Whoever claims to live in him, must walk as Jesus did" (1 Jn 2:6). Likewise Peter, on whom the Lord founded his Church, writes in his letter: "Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.' He was insulted, and did not retaliate with insults; when he was tortured, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to Him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:21-23).

The Saints Were Patient in Their Sufferings

10 The patriarchs, the prophets, and all those who imitated Christ, kept their patience with a strong and stable serenity.

So Abel, the first holy man who suffered martyrdom, did not resist or struggle against his brother; with humble and gentle patience, he allowed himself to be killed (Gen 4).

Abraham, trusting God and being the first to establish the root of faith, was tested; he was given to choose between God's Will and his own. He did not hesitate or delay but obeyed the command of God with full and devoted patience. Prefiguring our Lord as the victim, Isaac was patient when he was placed on the altar by his father to be sacrificed (cf Gen 22).

When Jacob was driven away from his own land by Esau, his brother, he departed patiently. Afterward, with greater patience, he humbly requested peace by means of gifts; he restored the harmony with his impious brother and persecutor (Gen 28 and 33).

Joseph, sold by his brothers and banished, not only patiently forgave but even generously and kindly gave them free grain when they came to him (Gen 37 and 45).

Moses was often scorned by an ungrateful people and almost stoned, and yet with mildness and patience he prayed to the Lord in their behalf (Nm 14 and 9).

A great example of Christian patience is found in David, from whom Christ descended according to the flesh. David many times had the opportunity to kill King Saul, his persecutor, who was eager to destroy him. Yet, when Saul was in his hands, David preferred to spare his life; he did not retaliate upon his enemy; on the contrary, he avenged him when Saul was killed in battle (2 Sam 1).

Many prophets have been killed, many martyrs have been honored with glorious deaths, and all have attained their heavenly crowns through patience. A crown for suffering is obtained only when there is patience in that suffering.

All Men Must Be Patient

11 At the beginning of the world and of the human race, Adam was unmindful of God's command and he violated it (Gen 3:17). Beloved brethren, we are also born to struggle here under trials and conflicts; let us now consider the judgment of God upon Adam, to see how necessary patience is, and how patient we must be in this world.

"To Adam, God said: 'Because you have listened to your wife and ate from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat.

'Accursed be the soil because of you.

With suffering shall you get your food from it
every day of your life.

It shall yield you brambles and thistles,
and you shall eat wild plants.

With sweat on your brow
shall you eat your bread,
until you return to the soil,
as you were taken from it.

For dust you are
and to dust you shall return”“ (Gen 3:17-19).

We are all fastened by the bond of this sentence until we leave this world. With suffering and toil we must work every day of our life. And we must earn our bread with sweat and labor.

A Christian Must Be Patient

Patience is necessary in the life of a Christian, at all times, in physical, moral, and spiritual issues. St Cyprian urges us to practice this virtue with sweetness, gentleness, strength, and persuasiveness. These are also the marks of true patience.

12 When a man is born and enters this world, he begins with tears. Inexperienced and ignorant of all things, he can do nothing else at his birth except weep. With natural foresight, he anticipates the anxieties of this mortal life; by weeping, his young soul testifies to the trials he is going to encounter. For he will toil and labor as long as he lives here. And nothing else can relieve those who labor and toil more than the consolation derived from patience.

Patience is necessary for everyone in this world, but even more for us, who want to follow Christ closely. We need more patience for the following reasons:

- We are more harassed by the onslaughts of the devil;
- Fighting daily on battlefield, we are wearied by our struggle against an old and well-trained enemy;
- In addition to the constant attacks of personal temptations, we suffer persecution, and, often, have to relinquish our wealth;
- We frequently have to bear chains and endure prison;
- We often have to undergo the sword, wild beasts, fire, the cross, all kinds of tortures and punishments, and finally give up our lives.

Thus, we need to rely on our faith and on the virtue of patience; the Lord himself teaches: “These things I have spoken to you so that in me you may have peace. In the world, you will have affliction. But take courage, I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33).

We have renounced the devil and the world; thus, we will suffer the attacks of the devil and the world more frequently and more violently. In this struggle, we absolutely need to maintain patience as our helper and companion, to endure all afflictions.

Persevere until the End

13 It is a precept from our Lord and Master: “He who has persevered until the end will be saved” (Mt 10:22). And again: “If you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (Jn 8:31-32). Having been given hope and a foretaste of truth and liberty, we must be patient and persevere, beloved brethren, until we finally attain the full Truth and Freedom in God.

The very fact that we are Christians is a source of faith and hope; we are in the way of salvation. But patience is needed for faith and hope to reach maturity and bear fruit. We do not strive for a present glory, but for a future one. As Paul the Apostle teaches: “Through hope we are saved. But a hope that is seen is not 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 patience” (Rom 8:24-25).

Patient waiting is necessary to accomplish, with God’s help, what we have begun; to obtain what we hope for and believe.

The same Apostle teaches us to do good works and store for ourselves treasures in heaven, but to be patient also. He says: “While we have the chance, we must do good for all, but especially for our brothers in the faith. We must never be tired of doing good, for if we persevere in the struggle we shall reap our harvest at the proper time” (Gal 6:10.9).

He does not want anyone to tire of doing good works through a lack of patience; he does not want anyone, overcome by temptations, to stop in the middle of the race toward heaven. Past merits would be lost for such a man, and whatever good he has begun would become imperfect. As it is written: “The integrity of an upright man will not save him once he has chosen to sin” (Ez 33:12). And again: “Hold firmly to what you already have, and let nobody take your crown away from you” (Apoc 3:11). These

words urge patient and resolute perseverance. We fight for a crown, and our victory is already near; we will be crowned if we suffer with patience.

Patience, a Defense against Temptations

14 Patience, beloved brethren, makes us preserve what is good in us, and repel what is evil. A patient man maintains a constant dialogue with the Holy Spirit and chooses always what is pleasing to God. When his soul is stormed, he struggles, using his virtues as a shield, against the temptations of the mind and the flesh.

Chief among these temptations are, impurity, dishonesty, and homicide; the rest may be deduced. These actions are mortal sins.

When our patience is strong and deeply rooted in our soul, our body, a temple of God, becomes holy and we are not corrupted by impurity; with child-like love for justice, we are not infected by dishonesty; and our hands, which have held the Eucharist, are not soiled by the blood-stained sword of violence.

Patience and Charity

15 Charity is the bond of fraternity, and the foundation of peace; it gives steadfastness and firmness to the bond of unity among us. Charity is greater than faith and hope (cf. 1 Cor 13:13). Good works and sufferings done out of charity are more excellent than those done with faith but without charity. As an eternal virtue, charity will remain with us forever in the kingdom of heaven.

Our charity should be accompanied by patience. Take away patience, and thus abandoned, charity will not last. Take away charity, the substance of endurance and tolerance, and patience, having no roots or strength, will not last.

St Paul, speaking about charity, joined patience to it: “Charity is patient and kind, it does not envy; charity is not boastful or conceited; it is never rude or selfish; it does not take offense, and is not resentful. Charity is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope, and to endure whatever comes” (1 Cor 13:4,5,7). Thus, he showed that charity can last only when one has learned to endure all things.

And in another place he says: “Bear with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness, and patience. Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together” (Eph 4:2-3). He confirmed that one needs patience to grow in the virtue of charity, to

preserve unity and peace with one's brothers, and to maintain the bond of fraternity.

Do Not Render Evil for Evil

16 We Christians are told not to swear or curse, not to seek again what has been taken away from us (cf. Lk 6:30); on receiving a blow to offer the other cheek also to our assailant (cf. Mt 5:39); to forgive a brother who offends us not only seventy times seven, but all his offenses without exception (cf. Mt 18:21,22); to love our enemies, and to pray for our persecutors (cf. Mt 18:21,22). We need a constant patience to endure these offenses.

We see what happened to Stephen, the first martyr among many who were to come. When the Jews were stoning him to death, he did not ask for vengeance but forgiveness for his murderers: "O Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (cf. Act 7:58-60). The first martyr for Christ was not only a preacher of the Lord's sufferings but also an imitator of Jesus' patient gentleness.

A Christian does not fall into anger, strife, or altercation. If he is patient, these evil passions do not enter his heart; or if they enter, they are quickly driven out. His heart continues to be peaceful, a temple where the God of peace is pleased to dwell.

Accordingly, the Apostle teaches us: "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, who has marked you with his seal for the day of redemption. Never have grudges against others, or lose your temper, or raise your voice to anybody, or call each other names, or slander anyone, or allow any form of malice" (Eph 4:30,31). A Christian is a person who has withdrawn from the fury and attacks of the flesh as from the storms of the sea, and has begun to be tranquil and gentle in the harbor of Christ; he should not admit into his heart anger or quarrel. It is wrong for a Christian to render evil for evil, or to hate.

How to Face Hardships

17 Everyone is often attacked by the devil with snares and oppressed by his flesh with unrelenting harassment; thus, patience is necessary to fight against these temptations of the flesh and the devil.

Ever since Adam disobeyed God's command, moral strength departed from us with the loss of immortality; weakness entered the body with the sentence of death. We will not regain our moral strength until we acquire immortality. Thus, we need to keep on struggling in this present state of

bodily weakness; and this fight can not be sustained without the strength of patience.

Various kinds of hardships are imposed on us to test us; many forms of temptations are inflicted upon us to prove us. We may lose our property, our health, meet an accident, or suffer the death of dear ones. How should we react?

In adversity, the wicked man complains and blasphemes because of his impatience, while the man seeking sanctity is steeled by his patience; thus, it is written: “Whatever happens to you, accept it; in crushing misfortune, be patient; for gold is tested in fire, and chosen men in the crucible of humiliation” (Sirach 2:4-5). Nothing else distinguishes better the holy man from the wicked.

Job’s Endurance

18 Job was tried, passed the test, and was raised to the pinnacle of praise because of his patience. How many weapons the devil hurled against him! How many torments he inflicted on him! A wealthy man and a father of a large family, Job suffered the loss of his property, and was left without children. Festering wounds covered his body, and a scourge of worms devoured his decaying limbs. And to leave no torment untried, the devil even used an ancient device of his wickedness: He armed Job’s wife against him, as if he could deceive and cheat every man through a woman, as he did in the beginning.

Nevertheless, Job was not broken by these continuous assaults; in spite of these trials and afflictions, he was praised by God for his victorious patience.

After his magnificent work of justice and mercy, Tobias was also tempted by the loss of his eyes; he endured his blindness with composure, and gained merit with God through his patience.

The Consequences of Impatience

19 Beloved brethren, consider how much evil impatience causes, so that the good of patience may shine forth in you more brightly.

Just as patience is a good of Christ, impatience is an evil of Satan. Just as the man in whom Christ lives is patient, the man full of the wickedness of the devil is impatient.

Consider the origins of impatience; the devil reacted with impatience against the announcement that man was made in the image of God. For this reason, he was the first to perish, and constantly causes others to perish.

In violation of the heavenly command, Adam did not resist the desire of the forbidden food, and fell into the death of sin; impatient, he did not preserve the grace received from God.

Cain was impatient of his brother's sacrifices, and killed him (cf. Gen 4:5). Impatient for the lentils, Esau put lower things before higher, and lost his birthright (cf. Gen 25:29-34).

Why were the Jewish people unfaithful and ungrateful toward the divine blessings? Was it not because of their impatience that they went away from God? When they could not bear the delay of Moses speaking with God in Mount Sinai, they demanded a man-made god; they proclaimed a golden calf, an earthly image, as the guide of their journey (cf. Ex 32). They never rid themselves of the fault of impatience; always impatient of the divine teaching and guidance, they killed all their prophets and just men; they hastened to the Cross and to the shedding of the Blood of the Lord.

Impatience also produces heretics in the Church, rebels against the peace and charity of Christ; it drives them to hostile acts and furious hates, after the manner of the Jews. In sum, while patience turns all our works and sufferings into glory, impatience reduces them to ruin.

Patience Permeates Every Aspect of a Christian's Struggle

Patience is the pith and marrow of St Cyprian's concept of Christianity.

20 Beloved brethren, we have seen the benefits of patience and the evils of impatience; let us, then, be patient; thus, we will abide in Christ and, with Christ, will come to God.

Patience, rich and manifold, should not be applied only to a narrow set of activities, or restricted to deeds of small extent; it should influence everything we do. Beginning as a single stream of grace, the virtue of patience spreads into rivers flowing through many glorious courses. No action of ours deserves the full amount of merit if it is not permeated by patience; if it is not watered and kept alive by one of these rivers.

Patience makes us acceptable to God and saves us for God. It tempers anger, bridles the tongue, governs the mind, guards the peace, imposes order and discipline in our lives, defeats the assaults of lust, suppresses the violence of pride, extinguishes the fire of conflict, restrains the abuse of power of the wealthy, and gives the poor fortitude to struggle through difficult circumstances.

Patience defends the blessed integrity of virgins, the exacting chastity of widows, and the indivisible love of husbands and wives. It makes men humble in prosperity, brave in adversity, meek in the face of insults.

Patience teaches us to pardon quickly those who offend us; it compels us to ask for pardon when we offend others. It helps us to defeat temptations, to withstand persecutions, to endure sufferings and martyrdom to the end. This same patience strongly strengthens the foundations of our faith, and promotes the growth of hope. It directs us to continue struggling along the way of Christ, God the Son, imitating His long-suffering patience; it ensures our perseverance as sons of God, while we imitate the patience of God the Father.

Wait until the Day of Future Deliverance

21 Beloved brethren, we find ourselves tossed about by the violent storms of a turbulent world; we are torn in the midst of persecutions of the Jews, the Gentiles, and the heretics. I know that many of us, suffering violence, are enraged against those who attack us; many of us, distressed by injustices, feel resentment toward the wrongdoers; and many wish to be quickly avenged. I must warn you, before I close, that we should patiently await the day of deliverance.

We should not rush to avenge our pain with an angry speed, since it is written: “Wait for me, says the Lord, for the day I will stand up to testify. I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms, and to pour out my wrath on them—all my fierce anger” (Zp 3:8).

The Lord commands us to wait and to endure with a strong patience the day of future deliverance. He says in the Apocalypse: “Do not keep the prophecies in this book a secret, because the time is near. Meanwhile let the sinner go on sinning, and the unclean continue to be unclean; let those who do good go on doing good, and those who are holy continue to be holy. Very soon now, I shall be with you again, bringing the reward to be given to every man according to what he has done” (Apoc 22:10-12).

Even as they cry out and are hustled off to the torture, the martyrs are still ordered to wait and to show patience in their suffering until the appointed time is fulfilled and the number of martyrs is completed. “When he broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of all the people who had been killed on account of the word of God, for witnessing to it. They shouted aloud, ‘Lord, Holy and True, how much longer will you wait before you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?’ Each

of them was given a white robe, and they were told to be patient a little longer, until the number was complete and their fellow servants and brothers had been killed just as they had been” (Apoc 6:9-11).

22 Through the prophet Malachi, the Holy Spirit describes the day of the divine retribution for the blood of the just: “Behold the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be like stubble. The day that is coming is going to burn them up, says the Lord Almighty. Not a root or a branch will be left to them” (Mal 4:1).

Likewise, the psalms declare that the coming of God, the Judge, must be awaited with awe, because of the majesty of his judgment: “God our God comes, he keeps silence no longer. A fire burns before him, and around him a tempest rages. He summons the heavens above and the earth, to his people’s trial: ‘Assemble my faithful before me who sealed my covenant by sacrifice!’ The heavens proclaim his justice, for he, God, is the judge” (Ps 50:3-6).

Isaiah describes the same judgment: “Lo, the Lord shall come in fire, his chariots like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For in the fire of the Lord they will be judged and by his sword they will be wounded” (Is 66:15-16). And again: “The Lord will advance like a hero, his fury will be stirred like a warrior’s. With a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies. For a long time I have been quiet and held myself back; shall I be silent always?” (Is 42:13-14).

God Will Demand Retribution

23 Who is telling us that He had been silent, but will not be silent forever?

— The One who was led like a lamb to the slaughter and who, as a sheep silent before its shearers, did not open his mouth” (cf. Is 53:7);

- The One who did not shout and whose voice was not heard in the streets;

- The One who was not rebellious;

- The One who offered his back to those who scourged him, and his cheeks to those who plucked his beard; who did not cover his face against blows, insults, and spittle (cf. Is 42:2; 50:5-6);

- The One who, accused by the priests and the whole Sanhedrin, answered nothing in his defense (cf. Mt 26:63); the One who, to the amazement of Pilate, kept a most patient silence (cf. Mt 27:14).

Although silent in his Passion, he will not be silent in the day of reckoning. He is our God; the God not recognized by all but only by the faithful, who believe in him. Although he was hidden in humility in his first coming, he will manifest himself in power in his Second Coming. Then, he will not be silent.

24 This is the Judge and the Avenger, beloved brethren, whom we are to await. He will come to demand a heavy reckoning for his sufferings, for the sufferings of the people of his Church, and of all the just from the beginning of the world.

No one should hasten and hurry too much to demand his own revenge; Jesus, who alone will settle the accounts, has not yet avenged himself.

God the Father commanded that his Son should be adored. Mindful of the divine precept, the Apostle Paul declares: "God exalted him to the highest place, and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus all beings, in the heavens, on earth, and under the earth, should bend the knee" (Phil 2:9-10).

In the Apocalypse, when John wishes to adore the Angel, he resists him and remarks: "Don't do that; I am a servant, just like you and like your brothers the prophets, and like those who treasure what you have written in this book. Adore Jesus the Lord" (Apoc 22:9).

See how wonderful is Jesus, our Lord, and what great patience he has; he is adored in heaven, yet, he has not been avenged on earth.

Beloved brethren, in our persecutions and sufferings, let us think of Jesus' patience. Let us show a full submission to God's Will, an acceptance of trials consistent with our expectation of his coming.

Let us not be anxious to shorten the length of our sufferings; we need not defend ourselves before the Lord, like an unfaithful and shameless slave trying to lessen his work. Rather, let us persevere and work.

Let us guard the precepts of the Lord, be watchful with our heart, and be generous in our sacrifice, even to the total acceptance of God's Will. When the day of reckoning comes, we will not be punished together with the unfaithful and sinners, but be honored with the just and those who fear God.

4

Patience

by St Augustine

St Augustine (354-430) was born in Tagaste (now Algeria, North Africa). After a licentious life, he was converted at the age of thirty-five in Milan, where he was baptized by the Bishop, St Ambrose. He returned to Africa and was ordained priest, and bishop of Hippo. There he undertook an enormous activity of preaching and writing in defense of the faith. He is one of the greatest Doctors of the Church.

This sermon on patience is attributed to St Augustine.

God Is Patient

1 Patience is primarily a virtue of man's soul; God bestows this great gift on man. We often say that God possesses it, that God is patient, for he, as a good Father, waits for the repentance of sinners. So, although God cannot suffer, and patience surely has its name from suffering and enduring (*patiendo*), we believe in a patient God and acknowledge him to be such.

How can we explain the nature and breadth of God's patience? We say that God is *impassible* (that he cannot suffer or have passions), but not *impatient*; he is extremely patient. His patience is beyond description, yet it exists as does his jealousy, his wrath, and any characteristic of this kind.

But these qualities do not exist in God in the same manner as they exist in us. In men, these feelings are coupled with a sense of annoyance, a condition that does not exist in God. God is jealous without any ill will, angry without being emotionally upset, compassionate without grieving, sorry without having to correct any fault of his; likewise he is patient without suffering at all.

Man's Patience

2 I shall try to explain the nature of human patience that we should attain and possess.

We possess the virtue of patience when we endure evils with equanimity, and retain the good that will lead us to sanctity. Rejecting evil and preserving goodness, it deserves the name of virtue if we struggle with serenity, in spite of the difficulties.

By their unwillingness to suffer, the impatient are not delivered from distress; instead, they bring upon themselves more pain and misery.

The patient prefer to endure wrongs rather than inflicting wrongs on the others; thus, they do not commit the sin of impatience. By bearing difficulties and not inflicting harm on the others, the patient lessen their pain and escape from the bad consequences of impatience. By accepting brief and passing evils, they do not lose the great and eternal good, for “the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared,” the Apostle says, “with the glory to come that will be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18). And he also says: “Our present light affliction, which is for the moment, prepares for us an eternal weight of glory that is beyond all measure” (2 Cor 4:17).

Suffering for Unworthy Objectives Is Not Patience

3 Dearly beloved, men are often willing to suffer hardships because of their excessive love for worldly things. They see material possessions solely as a means to greater happiness; they unhappily covet them. We see them bearing, with the utmost patience, extreme dangers and difficulties to acquire false riches, for empty honors, or out of love for frivolous pastimes. They are men eager for money, glory, and lust. To fulfil their desires and keep what they have acquired, they willingly and culpably suffer the heat of the sun, icy cold rain, tidal waves, hurricanes and stormy weather, the difficulties and dangers of wars, or terrible blows and dreadful wounds. These insane acts, somehow, seem licit to them.

4 Greed, ambition, luxury, and a passionate interest in frivolous games are considered blameless, unless they become the source of some crime or dishonesty forbidden by the laws of man.

Without defrauding anyone, a man may suffer and work intensely to make money, win fame by winning a contest, score in a game, or successfully present some theatrical play. And he is in no way criticized, but praised and given glory, because of the vanity of the people. As Scripture says: “The sinner is praised in the desires of his soul” (Ps 9:24).

Strong desires make their labor and suffering tolerable. But no one voluntarily suffers torture except for what will bring pleasure. To fulfil those desires men, passionately aflame, patiently endure many hardships and much bitterness. Why are these efforts considered licit and lawful, if the cause is unworthy?

Simple Endurance Is Not Patience

5 Why do men endure many grievous ills to perpetrate criminal acts? They are not willing to suffer as much in order to imprison the lawbreakers.

Highway robbers spend sleepless nights lying in wait for travelers, using their bodies and minds, under any darkened sky, to catch the harmless passerby. And some of them torture one another in their training to avoid being caught; this punishment in no way differs from the law's punishment. They are, perhaps, not tortured as much by the judge who tries to interrogate them, as they are by their fellow criminals, and yet they will not betray their partners in crime.

In all these instances, their patience is to be marveled at rather than praised; or rather, neither marveled at nor praised, for it is not patience at all. Their endurance is to be marveled at; their patience, denied. There is nothing in them deserving praise, nothing to be imitated, but instead something that deserves an increasingly severe punishment the more they use it, for it is a tool of vice.

Patience is the attendant of wisdom, not the handmaid of passion. Patience is the friend of a good conscience, not the enemy of innocence.

True Patience Is Known through Its Cause

6 True patience is recognized only through its cause. One easily distinguishes deserving patience from its opposite. Patience is real when its cause is good, untarnished by passion. But it does not deserve the name of patience when it is maintained to accomplish a criminal act.

All who know have knowledge, but not all who suffer have the virtue of patience. Those who suffer in the right way, merit praise for their true patience; they are crowned with the reward of patience.

Temporal Suffering and Eternal Salvation

7 We see that men willingly endure sufferings to accomplish their unlawful desires or even crimes to ensure their temporal well-being. How much should we endure even greater suffering to live a holy life, so that afterwards we may live forever secure in the true happiness of heaven without fear of ever losing our reward.

The Lord says: "By your patience you will win your souls" (Lk 21:19). He does not say: "villas, possessions, luxuries," but "your souls." If men suffer so much to gain material goods, the means by which they will lose their souls, how much should we be willing to suffer not to be lost forever?

To mention something blameless, if we are willing to suffer so much at the hands of doctors to cure our body, allowing them to cut or cauterize our flesh, how much should we suffer for our own safety against the attacks

of the enemies of our salvation? Doctors, by inflicting pain on the body, try to keep it from death; our enemies, on the other hand, by threatening us with hardships and death, are working for the eternal death of our body and soul in hell.

In his struggle to live a holy life, the thoughtful and wise man will patiently suffer in his body hardships and even death. The Apostle speaks of the redemption, the yearning of all human beings by which “we groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.” And he adds: “For in hope were we saved. But hope that is seen is not hope. For how can a man hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” (Rom 8:23-25).

Patience in the Body

8 At times, we may be distressed, suffering some material pain without really feeling any temptation to do something evil. We need then patience in the body to endure these attacks directed against the body. With this patience, we will possess our souls without causing distress on others. Our body may be suffering or going through a tremendous ailment; with patience we will regain lasting stability and happiness. Even through excruciating pain and death, we can obtain endless happiness and possess life forever.

Our Lord Jesus exhorted his martyrs to patience; he even promised them integrity of the body without the loss, not of a limb, let me say, but even of a single hair of their heads. “Amen, I say to you,” were his words, “not a hair of your head shall perish” (Lk 21:18).

Moreover, the Apostle says, “no one ever hated his own flesh” (Eph 5:29); thus, a sensible man is always vigilant over the integrity of his body; he must assure himself compensation in heaven for the losses of this present life, however serious they may be. He can achieve more by patience than by impatience, thinking of the inestimable gain of future incorruption.

Patience in the Soul

Patience is a virtue of the soul; the soul may practice patience with the body, as I have described, or with itself.

Without suffering any sickness or suffering in the body, one may be induced by adverse events, a treacherous action, or some insulting words to do or say something offensive or unbecoming. One practices patience in the soul when he rejects all these attacks and evil suggestions, and avoids committing sin in word or deed.

David's Patience

9 We can practice patience even if nothing disturbs us; for still we walk amid the stumbling blocks of this world, and our true happiness is deferred. "If we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." (Rom 8:25).

With this patience King David endured the insults of one abusing him; he could have easily wrought vengeance on him (2 Sam 16:5-23). He not only did not do this, but even calmed an officer who wanted to take revenge on the offender. David used his royal power to forbid rather than to exercise vengeance. He was not then suffering from any bodily disease or wound. But he did recognize the time of humility and accepted the Will of God for whose sake he drank in the bitter reproach with the utmost patience.

Our Lord's Patience

The Lord taught this kind of patience, too. The servants of the parable were disturbed at the mixture of cockle and wheat; they wanted to gather all together at once; the master replied: "Let both grow together until the harvest" (Mt 13:30).

One has to bear with patience whatever cannot be eliminated right away. Jesus himself furnished us an example of his patience; before his Passion, he endured the diabolic Judas as a thief before he exposed him as a traitor. And before his arrest, crucifixion, and death, Jesus did not refuse the kiss of peace from the betrayer's deceitful lips.

All these instances show a kind of patience in which the mind bears patiently not its own sins, but injustice from without, while the body remains undisturbed.

The Martyrs: Aiming at an Eternal Reward

10 There is also patience in the body. With it, one endures any suffering of the body, not, as in the case of foolish or vicious men, to attain empty honors or perpetrate crimes, but, as our Lord has said, "for the sake of justice" (Mt 5:10).

The holy martyrs exercised both types of patience: in the soul and in the body. They were overwhelmed with insults by the wicked; their souls had to withstand these humiliations while their bodies were not affected.

But the martyrs also had to exercise patience in the body; they were imprisoned, fettered, beset with hunger and thirst, tortured, lacerated, butchered, cut to pieces, and burned. Yet, with strong fidelity, they

remained unmoved; they subjected their minds to God while they suffered in the flesh whatever cruelty came into the minds of their executioners.

There is, indeed, a greater challenge to patience when an invisible enemy urges one to sin. Moved by his hatred for mankind, the devil uses snares to hunt us. The devil himself, through the sons of infidelity as well as through his own instruments, pursues the sons of light and attacks them with shrewd deceit. He presses on his wily assault with fury so that a sin, in thought or word, may be committed against God. But this enemy can be overcome openly and in broad daylight by not consenting.

Job: Anchored in God's Will

11 Holy Job had to experience both types of temptations against patience. But he rejected the temptations with the shield of his patience and conquered with the weapons of his fidelity.

At first, though his body was unharmed, Job lost all his possessions. The devil wanted to crush his soul before torturing his flesh by removing from him all things that men esteem as valuable. He imagined that Job would rebel against God after having been deprived of his wealth; that was—he thought—Job's only reason to love God.

Then Job was stricken by the sudden death of all his sons; at one stroke he lost those whom he had received—one by one—from God. The abundance of children was not to be a source of happiness for him, but a means of increasing his woes. Struck down with this misfortune, he remained immovable in God, fixed on the Will of Him whom he could not lose except by his own free decision. Job lost his children and possessions, but he possessed God who took them away; and in God, he found what had never perished. Job had not been stripped by one who desired to harm him, but by Him who had given him everything.

12 Then the enemy attacked Job's body. He did not touch Job's external things or possessions, but the man himself. From head to foot, Job burned with pain, his flesh swarmed with worms, matter oozed out from his wounds. But he remained there, his body rotten, his soul untouched, accepting with staunch fidelity and unshaken patience the horrible tortures of the decayed flesh.

His wife was there. She brought no help to her husband, but went on blaspheming God. Skilled in wrong-doing, the devil made use of her after destroying her sons; he had learned with Eve how convenient a woman is for the tempter.

But this time he did not find a man as gullible as Adam whom he could deceive through a woman. With his pains, this man was more on his guard than Adam had been in the grove of delight. Adam was defeated in his enjoyment, Job conquered with his suffering; the former consented to pleasure, the latter did not give in under torture.

And Job's friends came, not to console him in his misfortune, but to cast suspicion on his woes. They did not believe that he, suffering so grievously, was innocent. Their tongues were not silent; they assailed Job with false accusations that his conscience did not admit. He was enduring in his body the pains and wounds, and in his soul the accusations of his proud friends. Through patience, he corrected his wife's foolishness, and taught his friends wisdom.

Suicide Is No Solution

13 Those who are persecuted and forced to deny Christ or to do anything contrary to justice, should, as true martyrs, bear all things patiently rather than to inflict death upon themselves in their impatience. If suicide were right, holy Job would have destroyed himself to escape the diabolic cruelty, the attacks against his own possessions, his sons, and his own body. But he did not do it.

A wise man cannot commit against himself what not even Job's foolish wife had suggested. Because, if she had suggested it, she would have deserved the reply that she heard on suggesting blasphemy: "Thou hast spoken like a foolish woman: if we have taken happiness from God's hand, why should we not take sorrow?" (Job 2:10).

Had Job lost his patience either by blaspheming, as his wife wished, or by killing himself, which she did not dare to suggest, he would have died, and would be among those receiving this curse: "Woe to them that have lost patience" (Sirach 2:16). And he would have increased rather than escaped punishment; after the death of his body, he would have received the punishment of the blasphemers, or homicides, or the more grievous one of parricides.

Parricide is more heinous than any homicide, because one slays not merely a man, but a relative, or one's own father; the guilt is graver the closer the person one has destroyed. Thus, undoubtedly, one who commits suicide is a worse sinner, for no one is closer to a man than himself.

What are those wretched men doing, who suffer self-inflicted mutilations?¹ They will have to pay the penalty due, not only for their lack

of respect for God, but also for the brutality against themselves. And they look for the glory of martyrdom! If in time of persecution they killed themselves to avoid suffering in the hands of their persecutors, it would rightly be said of them: “Woe to those who have lost patience.” The reward of patience could not be given to them; impatient suffering cannot be crowned.

It is forbidden to murder a neighbor. Moreover, we have been told: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Mt 19:19). Thus, if one murders himself, he will be guilty of a grievous sin.

The Chosen Ones Are Tested with Fire

14 We read in the Holy Scripture the following advice on patience:.

My son, if you aspire to serve the Lord,
prepare yourself for temptation.

Be sincere of heart, be steadfast,
and do not be alarmed when disaster comes.

Cling to him and do not leave him,
so that you may be honored at the end of your days.

Whatever happens to you, accept it,
and in the uncertainties of your humble state, be patient,
since gold is tested with fire,
and chosen men in the crucible of humiliation (Sirach 2:1-5).

And in another place we read: “My son, do not reject the correction of the Lord, and do not faint when you are reprimanded; for he scourges every well-loved son” (cf. Prov 3:11-12). The expression, “well-loved son,” is equivalent to “chosen men” in the quotation given above.

We were ejected from the happiness of paradise because of our bold appetite for pleasures; thus, it seems fair that we should be taken back through the humble endurance of difficulties. Fugitives because of our own evil-doing, we will return to God through suffering evils. We acted contrary to justice, we must suffer for justice’ sake.

The Source of Patience

15 What is the source of true patience? Some say that true patience originates, not from God, but from man’s free will. This is an arrogant error, the error of the rich, “a reproach from the rich, and contempt from the proud” (Ps 123:4); this is the opposite of the patience of the poor, which “shall not perish forever” (Ps 9:19).

The poor receive patience from the wealthy One. They say, to Him, “You are my God, apart from you I have nothing good” (Ps 16:2); from Him “is every best gift and every perfect gift” (Jas 1:17). Thus, they seek from Him, beg from Him, knock on Him; they praise His name saying, “Deliver me, O my God, from the hand of the sinner, and from the clutches of evil and cruel men. For you alone are my patience, O Lord, my hope since my youth” (Ps 71:4-5).

The rich, those who do not accept that they are needy before the Lord, will not receive true patience from Him. Glorifying in their own false patience, they wish “to deride the poor man’s hopes, but the Lord is his refuge” (Ps 14:6). They attribute so much to themselves, to their will power; they do not apply to themselves the words of Scripture, “Cursed be the one who puts his trust in man” (Jer 17:5).

Sometimes they endure hard and rugged circumstances, but only not to displease men, or suffer worse hardships; or they suffer these circumstances with an arrogant will, seeking only their own pleasure and cultivating their vanity. What the blessed James the Apostle said about wisdom must be asserted about their patience: “Such *wisdom* does not come down from heaven. It is earthly, sensual, of the devil” (Jas 3:15).

There is a false patience in the proud as there is a false wisdom in them. God, the source of true wisdom, is the source of true patience. Thus, the poor in spirit sings to Him: “Find rest in God alone, my soul! He is the source of my patience” (cf. Ps 62:5).

Can We Be Patient without Charity?

16 Some may maintain any of the following propositions:

- Man alone, without any help of God, is able to endure painful circumstances only with the powers of his free will; he will do so to enjoy sinful delights in this mortal life. Thus, this very same man, in the same way, by the same powers of his free will, without awaiting divine help but relying only in its natural powers, is able to endure pain or suffering with patience for justice’ sake and for life eternal.

- The will of the wicked, without God’s help, is strong enough to lead them to endure torture voluntarily for something evil, even if no one threatens them.

- Those who love dilly-dallying are strong enough, without the help of God, to persist in their lies amid atrocious and lengthy torments in order

to avoid the death sentence that will result from the confession of their crimes.

- The will of the just is not strong enough, without strength from above, to make them endure punishment for justice sake, or for the love of eternal life.

18 But we read in the Scripture: “God is love; anyone who lives in love lives in God, and God lives in him” (1 Jn 4:16). Thus, one cannot have love of God without God, without God’s help; one cannot possess God without his help.

St Paul tells us about love of God and patience: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress, or persecution, or hunger, or nakedness, or danger, or the sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we face death all day long. We are regarded as sheep for the slaughter.’ But in all these things we overcome because of him who has loved us.” Not, then, through ourselves, but through “Him who has loved us.”

Then he continues: “For I am sure that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither things present nor things to come, nor powers, neither height nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom 8:35-39). This “love of God” is “poured into our hearts,” not by us, but “by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5).

On the other hand, the lust for evil – the root of false patience– comes “not from the Father but from the world” (1 Jn 2:16).

Human Motives, Not the Source of Patience

19 Those who maintain these opinions—against Scripture—do not see the difference between the true patience of the just—a divine gift—and that of the wicked, which is based on vile, human motivations; it is simple endurance.

They do not realize that the wicked man is hardened by his lusts to endure any outrage but only as long as he sees any chance of satisfying his desires. The lust for worldly things begins with a choice of the will, proceeds with the pleasure of the will, and is built up on a chain of habits.

Wicked men persist in their evil actions because of their lustful desire for worldly things. Whenever this desire for worldly things enables a man to sustain a calamity, man boasts in the strength of his own will; the desire is a stultifying disease, not a healthy remedy. That boasting is not patience

but madness. A wicked man seems more tolerant of sufferings the more he yearns for temporal goods, but he remains empty of eternal goods.

True Patience Is Infused by God

On the other hand, the greater the just man's love of God, the more courageous he will be to endure hardships. "The love of God has been poured into our hearts," surely not by us, but "by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us" (cf. Rom 5:5). Thus, the patience of the just man, and his charity, are from God.

Praising this charity, the Apostle says that it "is always patient and kind;" charity does not envy. A little later he says, "Charity is always ready to endure whatever comes" (1 Cor 13:7). The greater the charity of God that the saints possess, the more do they endure all things for Him whom they love. The stronger the desire for worldly things in sinners, the more do they endure any and all difficulties to satisfy their lusts.

The true patience of the just is from the same source as the charity of God which is in them. The false patience of the unjust is from the same source as their lust of the world. For this reason, John the Apostle says: "Do not love this passing world or anything that is in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him; because everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—does not come from the Father but from the world" (1 Jn 2:15-16).

The stronger and more vehement the lust of the sinner—this is not from God but from the world—the more willing is he to accept hardships in pursuing the object of his desires. The patience of the sinner, then, does not come from above, but is from the world.

The patience of the faithful, coming down from above, is from the Father of lights. The former is earthly, the latter heavenly; that is animal, this spiritual; that is devilish, this divinizing. The charity by which the upright man suffers all things is from God.

Human will, without God's help, can be sufficient for the man of false patience to keep him going; he will sustain evils, as long as he remains lustful. But human will is not sufficient for the man with true patience, unless it is aided and sparked from above. No one likes to suffer for no reason; thus, one cannot endure hardships in a meritorious manner unless one is enkindled by the Holy Spirit, the fire for the soul.

22 What is man, using his own will, before he chooses to love God? An unjust and hopeless creature. What is man?, I say—a creature drifting

away from his Creator, unless his Creator—taking care of him—chooses and loves him. Of himself, man cannot choose or love God, unless he is first chosen and loved by God.

But someone may say: “How can God choose and love man, an unjust worker of iniquity?” How? Because God loves man in a wonderful and ineffable way; because He is patient. Yet, can we not see that a good doctor both hates and loves the sick people? He hates them because they are sick; he loves them in order to rid them of their illness.

Charity and Divine Filiation, Roots of Patience

23 Charity is the root of God’s patience with man. Without it, there can be no true patience in us either. We are patient in doing good, despite difficulties, because of the love of God, which enables us to bear all things. This charity is infused in us by the Holy Spirit, “who has been given to us.” Thus, our patience is from God, as is our charity.

We are heirs who have been told: “You have not received a spirit of bondage so as to be again in fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons, by virtue of which we cry: “Abba! Father!””(Rom 8:5)

29 Let us cry out, therefore, moved by charity, and, until we reach heaven—our everlasting inheritance—let us be patient and abounding in love, not patient with a servile fear. Let us insist in our petition, as long as we are poor, until we are enriched with that inheritance. We have received wonderful pledges; to enrich us, Christ himself became poor, and after he had risen to heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit to inspire holy desires within our hearts.

We are poor; we believe without yet contemplating; we hope without yet possessing; we ardently desire without being settled in happiness; we hunger and thirst without being satiated.

“The patience of the poor,” the psalm says, “shall not perish forever” (Ps 9:19). This does not mean that with patience, we will have nothing to suffer; but that our sufferings will not be unfruitful. Patient suffering will bear eternal fruit that “shall not perish forever.”

He who labors in vain says: “I have lost so much labor,” because the results from his labor are disappointing. But he who attains what he expected from his work says: “I have not lost my labor.” It does not mean that his labor remains forever, but that it was not expended in vain.

We, the poor of Christ, are the enriched heirs of Christ; our patience will not perish forever, not because, in heaven, we will have to continue

suffering things patiently, but because in return for our patient sufferings here on earth, we will there enjoy eternal happiness. God, who gives us patience, will also give us eternal happiness; both gifts come from Him, from his charity, which is itself a gift. Amen.

Footnotes;

¹St Augustine is referring to the Donatists, heretics who mutilated themselves and offered themselves for martyrdom.

5

The Patience of Job

Pope St Gregory the Great

The Book of Job depicts patience in suffering; and the most famous of the patristic discussions of this book is that of Gregory the Great (c. 540-604). In this chapter, we offer a series of excerpts of St Gregory's *Morals on the Book of Job*, preceded by some comments from Pope John Paul II.

Elected pope against his own will, St Gregory bore this burden under severe bodily disease and suffering but with great benefit for the Church. He sternly reproved the Archbishop of Constantinople for assuming the title of "Universal Bishop." In 596, he sent St Augustine of Canterbury, a Benedictine monk like himself, to England to convert the Saxons to Christianity.

Like so many of the Fathers who discussed the problems of suffering, St Gregory had direct pastoral experience of it. The Italy in which he became pope in 590 was ravaged by flood, famine, disease, and the Lombard invasions. St Gregory's *Morals [or Commentary] on the Book of Job* offers the threefold literal, allegorical and moral interpretation inherited from earlier Greek exegesis; these extracts exemplify his moral reflections.

REASONS FOR SUFFERING

John Paul II

Commenting on Job's patience, Pope John Paul II (in his Encyclical *Salvifici Doloris*, part III) explains the two reasons for suffering: as a matter of strict justice to satisfy our misdeeds, and to gain more supernatural merit.

Each person finds his portion of suffering in this world. Within each form of suffering endured by man, there inevitably arises *the question: why?*

Man puts this question to God with all the emotion of his heart and with his mind full of dismay and anxiety. God expects the question and listens to it. In the Book of Job the question finds its most vivid expression.

This just man, without any fault of his own, was tried by innumerable sufferings. He lost his possessions, his sons and daughters, and finally he himself was afflicted by a grave disease. Thus, the first chapter goes:

In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.

He had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.

His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.

One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the Lord, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."

"Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land."

One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said:

Naked I came from my mother's womb,
and naked I will depart.

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away;
may the name of the Lord be praised.

In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. (Job 1:1-22)

In this horrible situation three old acquaintances came to Job's house, and each one in his own way tried to convince him that since he had been struck down by such varied and terrible sufferings, *he must have done something seriously wrong*. For suffering—they said—always strikes a man as punishment for a crime; it is sent by the absolutely just God and finds its reason in the order of justice.

Job's old friends wished not only to *convince him* of the moral justice of the evil, but also they attempted to *justify* to themselves the moral meaning of suffering. In their eyes suffering could have a meaning *only* as a punishment for sin; they considered suffering only on the level of God's justice, who repays good with good and evil with evil.

The opinion expressed by Job's friends manifests a conviction also found in the moral conscience of humanity: the objective moral order demands punishment for transgression, sin, and crime. It is true that *corresponding to the moral evil of sin, there is punishment*. Punishment guarantees the moral order; God is the just judge who rewards good and punishes evil. Suffering, thus, appeared as a "justified evil." It is expressed by one of Job's friends: "As I have seen, those who plough iniquity and sow trouble reap the same" (Job 4:8).

Job however challenged the principle that identifies suffering with punishment for sin. And he did this on the basis of his own opinion. For he was aware that he had not deserved such punishment, and, in fact, he spoke of the good that he had done during his life. In the end, God himself reproved Job's friends for their accusations and recognized that Job was not guilty. His suffering was the suffering of someone who is innocent; it must be accepted as a mystery, which the individual is unable to penetrate completely by his own intelligence.

The Book of Job teaches that while suffering is meant as punishment when it is connected with a fault, *it is not true that all suffering is a consequence of a fault and has the nature of a punishment.*

From the introduction of the Book it is apparent that God permitted Job's testing as a result of Satan's provocation. And when the Lord consented to test Job with suffering, he did it *to demonstrate the latter's righteousness.* The suffering had the nature of a test.

Thus, suffering is not to be unreservedly linked to the moral order, based on justice alone. Suffering must serve for *conversion*, that is, *for the rebuilding of goodness* in the subject who can recognize the divine mercy in the call to repentance. The purpose of penance is to overcome evil, which under different forms lies dormant in man. Its purpose is also to strengthen goodness both in man himself and in his relationships with others and especially with God.

But in order to perceive the true answer to the "why" of suffering, we must look to the revelation of divine love, the ultimate source of the meaning of everything that exists. Love is also the richest source of the meaning of suffering, which always remains a mystery. The answer has been given by God to man in the Cross of Jesus Christ.

With the Passion of Christ all human suffering has found itself in a new situation. It is as though Job had foreseen this when he said: "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth" (Job 19:25); as though he had found the fullness of meaning and given the right direction to his sufferings. In the Cross of Christ not only is the Redemption accomplished through suffering, but also *human suffering itself has been redeemed.*

MORALS ON THE BOOK OF JOB

by St Gregory the Great

Job's Meekness and Justice, Figure of Christ's

[Allegorical interpretation]

The blessed Job portrays the Redeemer. His name means "grieving." It refers both to our Mediator's Passion and to the travails of the Holy Church, our Lord's Mystical Body. The Church is constantly burdened by toil in the present life. In the book, Job's affliction is told, but not the duration of his test. Likewise we see the tribulation of the Holy Church, but do not know the duration of her suffering.

And that man was blameless and upright (Job 1:1).

Job's uprightness signifies his justice; his blamelessness, his meekness.

When we follow the straight line of justice, we tend to forget about meekness and compassion. When we try to be meek and compassionate, we often deviate from the straight line of justice.

Yet, the Lord Jesus maintained meekness with justice. In showing mercy he never did away with the demands of justice. Strict in justice, he never stopped being compassionate.

Some brought to him a woman caught in adultery. They were tempting him to fall into cruelty or injustice. He rejected both alternatives saying: "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (Jn 8:7). The first part of his answer, "If any one of you is without sin," shows us his simplicity and meekness. "Let him be the first to throw a stone at her," reveals to us his zealous sense of justice.

The prophet said about him: "In your majesty ride forth victoriously in behalf of truth, meekness and justice; let your right hand display awesome deeds" (Ps 45:4). In executing truth, our Lord kept meekness and compassion united with justice. He never lost the sense of rectitude for a fake feeling of compassion, or mercy for an overzealous sense of justice.

Job's Wife, Image of Sinners within the Church

Job's wife, who cursed him, represents the carnal people within the Church. These immoral people live near those seeking sanctity, because all share a common faith. Being part of the faithful, they mortify those who fear the Lord the more because they cannot be put aside. They are patiently endured by the faithful. They cause a greater harm the closer they are to the organs of decision within the Church.

Job's Friends, Image of the Heretics

Job's friends, while acting as his counselors, abused him. They are an image of the heretics. Under the pretense of giving counsel, the heretics lead many astray. Job's friends addressed him as if on behalf of the Lord, yet the Lord did not send them. Likewise all heretics, while they pretend to defend, only offend God. Thus Job told his friends: "I desire to speak to the Almighty and to argue my case with God. You are forgers of lies, you are followers of corrupt doctrines" (Job 13:3-4).

It sometimes happens that the heretics, penetrated by the streams of divine grace, return to the unity of the Universal Church. This is represented by the reconciliation of his friends. Yet, blessed Job is requested

to intercede for them, because the sacrifices of heretics can never be acceptable to God, unless they are offered in their behalf by the Church.

Detachment from Wealth

Job had seven sons and three daughters (Job 1:2).

A large family often load the heart of a father with greed. His heart is invaded with the desire to leave an inheritance to each child. However, at the beginning of the book, Job is declared devout in offering sacrifices, and also generous in giving alms. His feelings of affection for such a large family did not cause him to be greedy or attached to riches.

Job owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants (Job 1:3).

For any of us, the greater the loss, the greater the grief. To show how great was Job's virtue, we are told that his wealth was considerable. He lost it all, but suffered it with patience. We regret to depart from something we appreciate; we do not suffer when we are not attached to it.

In this passage of the Scripture Job's substance is described and immediately we are told that Job was resigned to the loss of it. Losing thus, without regret, indicates that Job kept all his wealth without being attached to it.

Charity

Job owned seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels (Job 1:3).

[Moral interpretation]

The sheep are presented as the symbol of innocence. In a spiritual sense, we possess seven thousand sheep when we harbor innocent thoughts in our mind and pure intentions in our heart.

Camels are seen as huge animals, their back crooked with the hump, that need to bend their legs to be loaded. We own three thousand camels when everything high and crooked in us is subdued to the order of reason and faith, and when our free will bows down with humility to the knowledge of the Blessed Trinity.

We possess camels when we put down in humility all the haughty thoughts we entertain. We own camels when we bend our feelings to nurture understanding for our brothers' weaknesses, and compassion for their shortcomings. We have camels when we lower ourselves to their level, when we help our brothers carry their burden.

Control of One's Thoughts

And Job had a large number of servants (Job 1:3).

The large number of servants represents the multitude of our thoughts. We possess a vast household with a large number of servants when we control our thoughts under the mastery of the mind. Under these conditions, we do not become impatient, our imagination does not get the better of our soul or resist the authority of the intelligence.

In any household, when the mistress is away, the tongues of the handmaids are released and become loose. The servants break their silence, neglect their duties, abandon their task, and disarrange the order and method of the home. But if the mistress suddenly appears, at once their noisy tongues become still, they renew the duties of their task, and they return to their work as if they had never left it.

Likewise, if, for a moment, reason is not present in the mind, our imagination becomes unruly and our thoughts multiply and go beyond control like a bevy of talkative maids. But as soon as reason regains control of the mind, the confused tumult quiets itself at once, and our thoughts submit themselves to the dominion of the mind as maids going to their task. Our thoughts and imaginations come up at the appropriate occasions and circumstances to help the design of the mind.

Thus, we “possess a large number of servants” when we rule our thoughts and imagination according to the discernment of our reason.

Job Represents Christ Sacrificing Himself for the Church

Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of his sons and daughters, thinking, “Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.” This was Job’s regular custom (Job 1:5).

Job did not cease to offer sacrifice. In like manner our Redeemer offers a holocaust for us without ceasing; his Incarnation is itself the offering for our purification. Jesus always intercedes for us.

Satan Did Not Understand Jesus’ Patience

“Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land” (Job 1:9-10).

In a spiritual sense, Job is a figure of Jesus. Satan claimed that both Job and his household were *hedged around*. This is so because he could not find an entrance to Jesus’ conscience and tempt him.

The devil, full of envy, thought that Jesus, kept in tranquillity by God's grace, could be led to sin by means of suffering. Thus, he asked God to send suffering to Jesus:

But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face (Job 1:11).

Satan surmised, "One who is accounted as God, who works miracles, will surely be discovered to be a sinner, and nothing better, if he is put to the test of afflictions, and loses his patience." But Jesus, God and man, endured the trials with patience.

Satan Knows When to Tempt

One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" (Job 1:13-15)

[Literal interpretation]

We should know at what times do temptations usually occur. The devil attacks preferably at those times; thus, he attacked the children of Job when they were feasting. The devil knows when and what to do. Even though he had gotten enough power, he chose the right circumstance. But at the end, it worked for God's glory and for our benefit.

We also learn from this lesson, that there is no complete happiness, that the delight of full enjoyment is the forerunner of suffering.

Trying Job's patience, the devil craftily did not say, "The oxen have been carried off by the Sabeans," but, "The oxen which have been carried off by the Sabeans *were plowing*." The lost profit from the oxen's labor was intended to make the wound inflicted sorer, as an added cause for sorrow. Job's woes were enlarged when he was announced new calamities.

While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" (Job 1:16)

As if the losses were not enough, Satan stirred even more Job's feelings with the very words of the messengers. Job is told, "The fire of God fell from the sky." These words were meant to say, "God, whom you loved so much and to whom you offered so many sacrifices, is now

punishing you. After wearing yourself out at His service daily, now you are suffering His wrath.”

The devil wanted Job to break down. He suggested that God, whom Job had served, was bringing this misfortune to him. He wanted Job to think that he had served in vain, and that God was unjust.

A Christian seeking sanctity may find the storms of tribulation gather strength without; he then seeks cover under God, his Father. In meeting contradictions from the hands of men, a Christian finds consolation in the thought, “God is my shelter.”

But the cunning adversary tried to crush Job’s patience by two simultaneous blows: by strokes from men, and by destroying Job’s confidence in God. Thus, he sent tidings that the Sabeans had taken away all of Job’s possessions, and afterwards that the fire of God had fallen from heaven. He was closing every avenue of consolation by showing Job that even God was against him.

By insinuating to him that he was forsaken on every side, the devil wanted Job to burst into desperation and revile God.

[Moral interpretation]

When the Tempter sees in someone a readiness to resist temptations, he tries to find what this person loves the best. And there he sets the trap; he takes this object away. The enemy knows that the more a man loves an object, the sooner he runs out of patience by the absence of it. The oxen and donkeys signify our most precious possessions; the servants, our reason. The devil manages to take away some consolation or material possession from us. Then, he has, as it were, carried off the donkeys from the field of our heart successfully if he breaks our patience.

Prudence leads us to carefully consider what to do in each circumstance using our reason. We consider what is proper in each case. But often the enemy rushes upon us the sudden impulse of the temptation; he catches us unaware before the reason can react. Thus the enemy slays, as it were, the very servants who were watching.

All the rest perishes and one servant alone returns home; one of the servants escapes to tell that all is lost. For whenever we give in to temptation, our reason returns later to consider what had occurred. In a certain sense, the reason is aware that it escaped alone, and thinks of all it

had gone through. Then reason can recover itself and bow down with heartfelt contrition.

The Camels, Image of Our Ordinary Work, Assailed by Three Enemies

While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" (Job 1:17)

The camels have good traits, for they ruminate like the oxen, thus they are clean animals. But they also have bad traits, for they do not cleave the hoof, like unclean animals.

With their mixture of good and bad elements, they signify our ordinary work. The servants signify all of us, working men entrusted by God with a human task.

Every working man, managing temporal affairs, is always the target of the darts of the hidden foe. The heavier his load is, the more intense the attack of the enemy.

A good manager aims to do things with an eye on the future. He forecasts future developments with exactness. In so doing he may neglect to consider present evils. Or, while attending to present business, he may be asleep to the anticipation of future events.

At times, in caring for some things slothfully, a manager may neglect what should be done with energy. Or in being overactive in the execution, he may hurt the more the interest of his employer.

Again, sometimes a manager strives to be sober in his speech, but he cannot keep silence for long because of the character of his business. Else, if he restrains himself with excessive rigor, he may become silent even in necessary things. On the other hand, if he gives himself more freedom to communicate necessary things, he may reveal what should not be told.

While the manager is embarrassed with such complicated thoughts, he is unable to ponder the future. While he produces nothing, he seems to be overburdened. In this atmosphere of impatience, the mind is unconcerned for necessary business to the extent that it thinks of trifles, instead of applying itself to honest work. While directing itself to outward concerns, the mind is cut off from its inner self, and knows nothing of the interior struggle going on.

Thus, it is as if *the Chaldeans sweep down on the camels and carry them off*. The devil deals a blow to our work—the matter of our stewardship—by promoting either a slothful or a headlong reckless mode of action. He throws our work into disarray by lack of temperance, by our unchecked use of speech or by our imprudent silence in necessary things. We fall into an excessive, disorderly work or into laziness. Meanwhile he burdens us with excessive loads and care for material, external trifles. Impatience may lead us to cut off the relation between our work and God. Thus, we are robbed of our work because it ceases being a productive instrument of sanctification.

The devil, like these *three raiding parties* or bands of Chaldeans, spreads confusion on our duties, now by unwarranted hyperactivity, now by unregulated thought, now by excessive anxiety over material concerns. In that confusion, a person's will may give in to temptation. Impatience may lead him to cut off the relation between himself and God. It is as if *the Chaldeans had put the servants to the sword*.

Yet, we are told that *only one servant escaped to tell Job* because, after sinning, the mind is not totally blind. Man has enough discretion to understand what he has lost by the sudden onset of temptation.

While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" (Job 1:18-19).

The devil continued to assail Job's patience; by striking him twice and thrice, he wanted to reach the very core of Job's confidence in God.

It is true that God dictates the elements, but it does not follow that he put them in motion to punish Job. God allowed Satan to stir the elements by giving him power. By abusing this power, Satan, in the end, served God's designs.

We should not be disturbed at the thought that the devil can stir the air into a storm; it always serves God's purpose. We know that God's providence reaches down even those sentenced to forced labor in the mines.

The devil inflicted on the peaceful Job wound upon wound to urge him to words of impatience. He busied himself to break Job's patience not only by the loss of his property, but also by the increasing gravity of the disasters announced. First, it was the loss of his property, and then, the

death of his children. Had it been in the reverse order, Job would not have suffered so much the loss of property, for there were no heirs any more for that property. The succession of the announcements, the increasing weight of them, and the suddenness of each disaster were calculated to inflame Job to utter blasphemy.

The younger children were feasting “at the oldest brother’s house.” It is said that some feasts are an occasion for transgressions. The lesson here is that the younger children should be controlled by the older ones. If the elders themselves are followers of pleasures, the reins of license will be let loose for the younger ones too. For, who would keep himself under the control of an authority who give himself to illicit pleasures?

Feasting in the house of their elder brother, the younger ones perished; the enemy gets more effective power against us when the persons in charge of guidance fail to do so.

[Allegorical interpretation]

In an allegorical sense, the *desert* is the multitude of impure spirits. The devils are like barren land; as they rejected the happiness of their Creator, they also lost the hand of their cultivator.

The strong wind coming from that desert that overthrew the house represents the temptation from the devil. It seizes us and overturns the conscience from its settled frame of tranquillity. The house, which is our conscience, has *four corners*, the virtues of prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice. Our moral life is grounded on these four virtues.

The rivers of paradise that water the earth are also four. And our heart is cooled from the heat of carnal desires when it is watered with these four virtues. But prudence waxes cold when idleness steals on our day; it becomes lazy and neglects to be vigilant over the future. Temperance decays when some illicit delight occupies the mind; it loses determination to avoid forbidden pleasures.

Fear works its way into the heart and dissipates our fortitude when we love excessively some created good and dread to part with it. The more attachments we possess, the less able we are to encounter adversity. We swerve from the straight line of justice when self love invades the soul. We refuse to refer everything to our Creator and, instead, commit injustice.

The sudden and mighty wind that swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house is the strong temptation, the uncontrolled

hidden impulse, that shakes the four cardinal virtues. With the main pillars or corners destroyed, the house is uprooted. When the virtues are beaten, the conscience is brought to trouble.

The soul is carried to the topmost height of perfection when these four virtues are deeply rooted within it, as the four pillars of a tent. Moreover, we are told that *Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house*. The sons are an image of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. These gifts dwell in the soul and take their food together at ease, as if feasting.

The Holy Spirit forms first in the soul of a patient man prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice—the four corners—to resist any assault. Afterwards the same Spirit brings his gifts: wisdom, against the folly of pride; understanding, against dullness; counsel, against rashness; knowledge, against ignorance; fortitude, against fear; piety, against hardness of heart; and fear of the Lord.

Typically, while we are overjoyed with filial fear of the Lord, we may be struck with pride. Fear of the Lord leads us back to humility and to recover a firmer footing. This gift enables us to submit to God's will, to have a profound respect for the majesty of God, and to dread sin as the greatest of evils.

Sometimes, while we fight resolutely to overcome the obstacles against our sanctification and our apostolate, we are struck with violent alarm and cowardice. We conquer that fear with the gift of fortitude. It leads us to continue fighting and to attribute our strength to God.

Repeatedly, while ordering divine and human things with enormous tenderness, we are struck with a sudden hardness of heart. The gift of piety enables us to deal with God with tender and filial love, and to use charity with men as children of God.

We may congratulate ourselves that we do everything only after mature deliberation. But suddenly we see ourselves confused with rashness. We must do everything with method, but not attribute our counsels to our own powers. We receive the gift of counsel to make us more prudent in guiding ourselves and others to fulfil the will of God.

Often, we think we know great things, but suddenly we are stunned with ignorance about the way to reach our supernatural end, about God's purpose on ordinary matters, and about the relative value of temporal

things. The gift of knowledge enables us to perceive the value of earthly things in relation to God.

Habitually, pride gives us a certain dullness of soul that makes us blind not only to the supernatural mysteries but even the lowest subjects. Only afterwards does the mind recover itself and become humbler and wiser. The gift of understanding makes us see more clearly the mysteries of faith.

When the crisis of temptation comes, an extreme folly seems to invade our wisdom: the mind does not know how to face the threats, or how to reject temptation. Wisdom makes us desire and love the things of God, and directs our whole life and all our actions to his honor and glory.

While the soul is sustained with this fullness of gifts and feels secure, it may forget their source. The soul imagines that the gifts derive from itself, and that it will never lack them. Thus, God sometimes withdraws his light from us for our good. He shows the presumptuous soul how weak it is in itself. By losing them, we learn where our good qualities come from; we learn that they cannot be preserved by our own effort alone.

The house is overthrown and the sons perish because when the conscience is assailed with temptation the virtues and gifts may be temporarily overwhelmed. These sons, however, live in the Spirit because by patience and perseverance in the struggle they are recovered.

The three daughters of Job were slain. They are an image of the three theological virtues. Charity is affected by adverse situations. Hope is shaken by fear. Faith is beaten by questioning. Chastened by the rod, we grow dull in our love for God when we think this suffering is unreasonable.

These virtues seem to die, but are kept alive in the sight of God. By patience and perseverance in the struggle they are also recovered.

A servant escaped alone to tell these things to Job. We are told, thus, that even amid the strongest temptations we are in control of the situation. The mind retains enough discretion to realize what is happening, and our conscience is struck with a sense of guilt and contrition that lead us to rectify.

When the temptation is rejected, the person comes out humbler, stronger to stand firm, and alert to resist any trick of the enemy. The person tempted learns to be more vigilant, and to ask fortitude from God.

At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship (Job 1:20).

[Literal interpretation]

There are some who are insensitive to punishment when they are severely corrected, unmoved by pain inflicted on them. They think they possess great philosophical fortitude. And there are others so oversensitive to distress that they even fall into excesses of the tongue. Whoever wants to follow true wisdom must go between these two extremes.

Unhealthy limbs become numb and cannot feel any pain even when cut. Likewise, true virtue does not consist in having a heart of stone. Insensitivity to God's correction is criticized by the prophet: "O Lord, you struck them, but they felt no pain; you crushed them, but they refused correction. They made their faces harder than stone and refused to repent" (Jer 5:3).

On the other hand, anyone feeling the pain of tribulation beyond what is reasonable is going away from virtue. When the heart is afflicted with excessive sorrow, it falls into impatience. Instead of amending his sins by the chastisement, one's wickedness is increased with the correction. The psalmist scolds those who become fainthearted at the moment of purifying penance: "They will never stand fast in adversity" (Ps 140:10 Vulg.). They would "stand fast in adversity" if they endured hardship with patience. But as soon as they sink in spirit, when pressed with blows, they lose the firmness of their footing.

Blessed Job was truly wise; he kept himself from either extreme. With marvelous skill he avoided either being insensitive to the pain he was suffering, or excessively feeling the pain, which could lead him to curse the Creator. Rather, "he got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship." It is evident that he felt the pain, for he *tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell to the ground*. It is also clear that even in the midst of punishment he did not rebel against the will of God, for *he worshipped Him*.

Job was not altogether unmoved; such insensitivity would have shown contempt of God. Neither was he completely in commotion; such excess of grief would have led him to commit sin.

There are two parts in the commandment of love, love of God, and of our neighbor. Job paid first the debt of mourning his children by tearing his robe and shaving his head. And then he showed his love of God by praying amid his groans.

There are some who say they love God; they are, then, enjoying prosperity. But they abandon Him when stricken with purifying correction. Blessed Job accepted the correction of his Father God and continued humbly worshipping him; by this he showed that even under pain he would not give up the love of his Father.

Job did not show pride by his insensitivity, for he fell down at the stroke. But he did not estrange himself from the Striker, for he fell down *to worship*.

It was customary in ancient times to keep up one's appearance by wearing long hair; it was cut off in time of mourning. If anyone cut his hair in peaceful times, he showed some distress. Job preserved his hair in the season of prosperity and shaved his head in time of mourning.

In such circumstances, we see him spoiled of his substance, bereft of his children, having rent his mantle and shaven his head, and fallen to the ground. Let us hear what he says:

*Naked I came from my mother's womb,
and naked I will depart.*

*The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away;
may the name of the Lord be praised (Job 1:21).*

Job lied prostrate on the ground with his clothes rent, but the counsels of his heart were sublime. His heart was enthroned on high. Because of God's will, he had lost all he had. To moderate his concern for having lost his wealth, he considered that there was a time in which he had nothing. When one loses everything, it is a high consolation to recall those times when one did not possess yet what one has lost.

To keep his patience at the hour of mourning for what he had lost, Blessed Job pondered attentively in what condition he was at the beginning, before he acquired his wealth. And then, to preserve his patience in the future, he considered what will happen to him: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart." As if saying: "Naked was I born from the earth, naked will the earth receive me back, when I depart from this world. I will lose what was given to me, what I should have abandoned. After all, these things were not really *my own*."

Not without reason we call the earth our mother, for we come from it. “A heavy yoke is upon the sons of Adam, from the day that they go out of their mother’s womb, till the day that they return to the mother of all things” (Sir 40:1).

Job sought consolation not only by considering that everything comes from God, but also by pondering over God’s justice in taking away what he had given. Thus, Job added: “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Let it be done according to God’s will. May the name of the Lord be praised.”

This holy man, under trial from the adversary, had lost everything. Yet he knew that Satan had no power against him to tempt him, except with the Lord’s permission. Thus, he did not say, “The Lord has given, the devil has taken away,” but, “the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.” Anyone would grieve if the enemy took what God had given him. But no one took away from Job what was his. God had only recalled what was His own. We have received from God everything we use in our present life, should we grieve if God wants us to surrender what we have only on loan? Is God an unfair creditor if he exacts what he has lent? Thus, it is well added, “Let it be done according to God’s will.”

In this life we necessarily undergo things against our will and choice. We need to turn our will to God, to accept what He wants. He can never desire for us anything unjust. If we turn to him, we will find great comfort in what is disagreeable to us, because we will realize that it comes for our Father God, and nothing but justice can come from him. God always wants what is just, and we should suffer whatever God wants. Thus, whatever we suffer is just. It would be injustice to murmur at a just suffering.

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; as it has pleased the Lord, so it be done; may the name of the Lord be praised (Job 1:21).

[Allegorical interpretation]

When Jesus was near his Passion *he took bread and gave thanks*. He who is about to bear the consequences of the sins of the others, gives thanks. He who did nothing deserving blows and punishment, blesses humbly under blows and punishment. He bears with patience the chastisement for the transgressions of others so that each man may learn to bear with patience the punishment due for his own transgressions. If the

Master was patient, blessed, and gave thanks under the rod, the servant should do likewise under correction.

[Literal interpretation]

Job defended his cause against his adversary, the devil. At the end of his speech he blessed his Judge, God, saying, “May the name of the Lord be praised.” The devil, though created in bliss, revolted against God, while Job, a mortal man, blessed the Lord even when afflicted by His scourge. Thus, after having defeated his adversary, Job put him to shame.

The enemy constantly strikes us with temptations as if they were darts. Every day we stand in the field of battle exposed to the arrows of his temptations. But we must not be passive. Even when pierced with arrows, we ourselves can send javelins against him; we can be humble to answer his snares. Thus, Blessed Job, when stricken with the loss of his wealth and the death of his children, turned his anguish into praise of his Creator. By his humility, he struck down the devil in his pride; by his patience, he defeated his cruel enemy.

Never imagine that a Christian receives wounds but cannot inflict any on the devil. One should have words or thoughts of patience to praise God when one is in distress. These words or thoughts are like darts hurled onto the breast of the adversary. These weapons inflict much sorer wounds to the devil than those he causes on us.

With affliction Job lost the things of earth, but by bearing this affliction with patience and humility he multiplied God’s blessings on him.

In all this, Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing (Job 1:22).

When afflicted by trial we may be guilty of sin by harboring foolish thoughts, or even by uttering offensive words. Job did not sin with his lips or in his heart. The Scripture says that he *did not sin*; it adds, *or charge God with wrongdoing*. It implies that Job did not sin in his thoughts or murmur accusations against God. By rejecting bad thoughts from his mind, he excluded the sin of murmuring. He neither swelled with indignation in his silent reflection nor reviled God with his loose tongue.

One who tries to justify himself when stricken by divine chastisement is *charging God with wrongdoing*. If, in his pride, he tries to assert his innocence, what else is he doing but doubting the justice of God?

* * *

The sufferings of the Body of the Church reach Her Head

Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason." (Job 2:3)

[Typical sense]

As we have seen, in a mystical sense, Job represents Jesus Christ. But because of the union between the Head and the Body, and the bond of love between them, the suffering of the Church is also Jesus' suffering.

We must be patient; the torments that we endure reach our Head. Thus, Jesus cried out from heaven on behalf of his afflicted Members, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4). Our agony is also Jesus' pain. Thus, once converted, while suffering for Jesus, St Paul said, "Now I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions" (Col 1:24).

Jesus Suffered as Man

The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare the life of his soul" (Job 2:6).

We can interpret these words in an allegorical-typical sense, applying them to Jesus. But who would believe that God, the Creator of all things, was given into the hands of Satan? Yet, instructed by the Truth, we know that all those who execute Satan's plans are his members, his hands.

Pilate showed himself to be a member of Satan when he put Jesus to death. He did not acknowledge that Jesus was the Lord who came to redeem us. The chief priests proved themselves to be Satan's members when they strove to drive the world's Redeemer away from the world, by persecuting him even to the Cross.

The Lord gave himself up to the hands of Satan's members. He let loose Satan's hand to rage against him. By outwardly falling low, Jesus set us free both outwardly and inwardly.

Satan's hands are also his powers. Jesus endured Satan's power by bearing the piercing of his hands with nails, the spitting, the blows, the scourging, the Cross, and the lance. He suffered outwardly all that he had inwardly preordained to endure. Thus, Jesus told Pilate, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above" (Jn 19:11). God gave this power to Pilate over his body to serve the end of His will. The very cruelty of the persecutor and the evil mind of the unbelievers served

the plans of God and the good of all the elect. Unknowingly, Jesus' persecutors fulfilled the plans of God.

"Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God, so he got up from the meal, and took off his outer clothing" (Jn 13:3-4).

See how Jesus is going to come into the hands of his persecutors. He knew that these persecutors were into his own hands, for God had put all things under his power. Yet He suffered patiently.

Satan was ordered to *spare the life of his soul*. It does not mean that Satan could not tempt this man's soul, rather he is reminded that he had no power to overcome Jesus. Mere men are often shaken by the assault of temptation. But the soul of our Redeemer was never disturbed by this attack. Although our enemy took him into a high mountain, promising him the kingdoms of earth, and showed him stones to be turned into bread, yet he had no power to shake the mind of the Mediator between man and God. In spite of the external temptations, Jesus' mind, established in his divine nature, remained undisturbed.

Sacred Scripture tells us that, on some occasions, Jesus was *deeply moved* (Jn 11:38), and that his soul was *troubled* (Jn 11:33). In each case, Jesus decided with his divine nature how much his human nature should be troubled. God remained unchangeable, ruling over all things, yet showing himself subject to change; he remained at rest within himself, yet troubled in spirit in the human nature he had taken.

There is nothing anyone loves more than the life of his soul. The expression *spare the life of his soul* refers to the life of those whom Christ loves, the Christians. It is equivalent to saying: "Take revenge against his body but lose your wicked dominion over the elect, those whom Jesus considers his own."

Satan was allowed to smite our Redeemer's flesh, but he was prevented from touching his soul. That is, Jesus endured the Passion in his body to set us free from the dominion of the devil. He suffered death on the Cross to defend us against the assaults of the foe.

So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head (Job 2:7).

[Allegorical interpretation]

To enter the number of the elect one has to withstand the attacks of this enemy. From the beginning of the world the members of our Redeemer's body not only have lived saintly lives but also suffered wrongs.

Abel, a member of the elect, gave glory to God with his offerings and died without a word. He is a figure of Christ, of whom it is said: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth" (Is 53:7).

From the very beginning of the world the devil strove to vanquish the Body of our Redeemer. Thus, he inflicted wounds *from the soles of his feet to the top of his head*. That is, he began his attacks on mere men, like Abel, and came to the very Head of the Church, Christ our Lord, in his rage.

Christ Comes to the Penitent

Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat on a dunghill (Job 2:8).

[Typical interpretation]

The broken pottery, a potsherd, in the hand of the Lord is the clay of his human nature. A potsherd receives firmness by fire, and the human nature of our Lord was rendered stronger by the fire of his Passion.

He sat on a dunghill, not in a court of law, not in a building rising on high. Our Redeemer took on our flesh; "God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong" (1 Cor 1:27).

The Jews in their pride were ruined, their Temple left desolate. Jesus sits on a dunghill, outside this building, when he reigns over the Gentile world, for so long despised by Israel. Jesus is found outside the house with all his sores when he suffers patiently the pain of his Passion among the scorn of his people. "He came to his own, but his own did not receive him" (Jn 1:11).

A penitent sinner is like a dunghill; he dwells and laments his corruption; his sins are before his eyes like dung. Jesus sits upon a dunghill in grief because he comes near the repentant sinner and is willing to take possession of a sorrowful heart.

Holy Men Resist the Foe by Patience

His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman.

Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said (Job 2:9-10).

[Allegorical interpretation]

A holy man is engaged in a total war with the enemy. There are two fronts in this war: within and without. He is exposed to violent blows in his external life and, at the same time, poisoned by urgent persuasions in his inner self. With a wonderful skill in virtue, he strikes against either form of warfare. He presents the shield of patience against the blows of fortune, and launches the darts of instruction against the internal subtle suggestions. He faces with courage the adverse events without, and applies wise counsel to the motions within. Patience will put down the attacking enemy soldiers; wisdom and soundness will correct and cure the wounded men from within our ranks. One must prevent the attackers from taking over and controlling the external situation by using the shield of patience. One must also take care of the crippled soldiers by bringing our thoughts under the rule of reason.

St Paul tells us of his struggle, "Our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears" (2 Cor 7:5). He tells of the struggle he underwent externally: "I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers" (2 Cor 11:26). He then tells us how he faced these external blows with the weapons of patience: "I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked" (2 Cor 11:27).

While maintaining that fight without, he guarded the inner camp too: "Besides those things that are without, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches" (2 Cor 11:28).

St Paul took bravely those fights; he spent himself defending his neighbor. He described the ills he suffered and added the good he imparted; he underwent troubles without and defended the weak within.

See how patient he was. He knew that these fights without were his lot: persecuted, torn with scourgings, and bound with chains. But, at the same time, he worried that his sufferings might discourage some disciple. He feared that someone might be inconsistent in living his faith. Thus, he explained that the life of a Christian is warfare: "So that no one would be

unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them” (1 Thes 3:3).

Notice Paul’s love for his brothers. He did not mind the wounds of his body; he rather healed the wounds of the others caused by the evil promptings of discouragement. A holy man never gives up caring for the others, even if he is suffering in his flesh. Like a great physician who is ill and keeps on curing the others, he continues giving instruction and spiritual guidance even though he is suffering from lacerations. He prefers the health of the others to his own cure.

It is rather easy either to give spiritual guidance when one is not suffering, or to suffer when one does not have to give guidance. A holy man skillfully applies his energies to both tasks. When he is stricken with afflictions, he calmly faces this attack from without; at the same time he cares that the interior life of his neighbor is not rent and torn.

A soldier of Christ stands up courageously in the line. With one hand, he throws the javelin to the chests of those advancing against him; with the other hand, he uses his shield to cover his feebler comrades in the rear. With a rapid glance he looks out on either side; now he pierces the daring foe in front, now he shields the trembling friends behind.

A holy man is skilled in meeting external adversity and, at the same time, he is able to give spiritual guidance and encouragement. Thus, we are told: “Act like men, and God shall give strength to your heart” (Ps 31:24 Vulg.)—*Viriliter agite et confortetur cor vestrum*. Carnal men serve God only with a swerving intention; they are not undeservedly called “women.” We could tell them: “*You are talking like a foolish woman.*”

Looking at Heaven

Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?

This is like saying: “If we are to enjoy eternal bliss, why should we be surprised to find temporal evils?” This was the mind of St Paul when he wrote: “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18).

In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

When a holy man suffers persecution from within and from without, he does not insult God or speak against his enemies. Thus, St Peter, the leader of the elect, rightly warns us: “If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as an evil speaker”

(1 Pet 4:15). An evil speaker is a person who easily blames and launches insults to the others. When he suffers, he breaks loose in invectives against his persecutors. The Holy Church—the Body of our Redeemer—so bears the burden of her sorrows that she never breaks the bounds of patience and humility. Thus it is rightly said of a holy man who suffers: *In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.*

In What Sense God Sends Us Evils

The Lord said to Satan, “Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life.” So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes. His wife said to him, “Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!” He replied, “You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” In all this, Job did not sin in what he said (Job 2:6-10).

[Literal interpretation]

It is a great consolation for our affliction to recall God’s gifts to us. When we do so, our strength does not break down; the memory of God’s loving care lifts us up quickly. Thus, it is written: “In the day of prosperity be not unmindful of affliction, and in the day of affliction be not unmindful of prosperity” (Sir 11:25).

Anyone who receives God’s gifts and while receiving them is not ready to accept also hardships, is bound to fall from his joy. And anyone bruised with scourges yet while in the midst of tribulation, neglects to seek consolation by considering the gifts he had received from God in the past, will lose the serenity of his mind and fall into despair.

We must then attend to both possibilities. The dread of future chastisement will tone down the joy of the present gift, and the remembrance of the past gifts will moderate the pain of tribulation.

A holy man soothes the depression of his mind, cures his wounds, and mitigates the strokes by weighing the sweetness of God’s gifts saying, “If we have received good at the hand of the Lord, shall we not receive tribulation?”

We Need Patience to Avoid Sin

In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

[Literal interpretation]

We sin with our lips in two ways, by saying unjust things or by withholding the truth. Sometimes it is a sin to keep silence, as the prophet said: “Woe to me, that I held my peace” (Is 6:5 Vulg.).

All the while, Blessed Job did not sin with his lips. He did not speak against God or withhold the right answer to the bad adviser. He gave thanks to God the Father who smote him; he gave a wise answer and sound instruction to his ill-advising wife. He knew what he owed God—resignation—and his wife—wisdom. He gave them both, by praising God’s will and uttering reproof to his wife.

Who of us, wounded with such severe affliction, will not become depressed interiorly? Outwardly prostrated by the wounds of his flesh, Job stood erect in the realm of his mind. He saw every arrow fly past his soul without hitting his inner sanctuary, while the raging enemy pierced his body outwardly. Watchfully he dodged the javelins of the foe thrown to his soul frontally—the wounds of his body—and on his flank—his wife’s words.

While attacked from every side, our champion sheltered himself with the shield of patience.

Satan Uses Good Men for His Evil Plans

When Job’s three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. (Job 2:11)

But the more valiantly the enemy is overcome, the more hotly he is provoked to additional acts of malice. He first tried his blows with repeated announcements of the losses of Job’s wealth. Then with the discouraging suggestions of his wife. And when she remained silent, the foe tried to penetrate his firm heart by sending him friends with misleading recommendations to undermine his soul.

True Strength Results in Patience

Think how you have instructed many, how you have strengthened feeble hands. Your words have supported those who stumbled; you have strengthened faltering knees. But now trouble comes to you, and you are discouraged; it strikes you, and you are dismayed. Where is your fear of the Lord—your confidence in God—your patience, and your perfect plan of life? Should not your piety be your confidence and your sanctity of life your hope? “Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed?” (Job 4:3-7 Vulg.).

[Literal interpretation]

One who begins his path toward God with *fear of the Lord*, soon is rewarded with *strength* to his fear, then *patience* is added to his strength, and finally *perfection* crowns his patience.

On the other hand, in the world away from God, fear gives rise only to weakness. There, it is defiance that generates strength.

In the way of the Lord defiance engenders weakness, and fear generates strength, as the book of Proverbs says: “He who fears the Lord has a secure fortress” (Prov 14:26).

A man with fear of the Lord has a strong confidence in him. He considers all the temporal difficulties as nothing. The more difficulties, the more he obeys with confidence the Author of those same inconveniences. United to the Creator by a holy confidence, he is strong, never alarmed.

Strength is always shown in adversity. Thus, patience always comes after true strength. A man advances “in strength” as he endures with great heart the wrongs of other men. One who falls to the ground when he encounters wickedness in the others is not strong at all. Whoever cannot endure opposition and difficulties will lie pierced with the sword of his cowardice.

And the result of patience is perfection. A perfect man does not feel impatient when he deals with the imperfection of his neighbor. Whoever is unable to bear the imperfection of another shows that he is not yet perfectly advanced in the way of God.

We are told: “In your patience you will possess your souls” (Lk 21:19). To possess our souls is to do our duty with perfection, to control all the motions of our mind, memory, and imagination according to the rule of virtue. Thus, one who is patient possesses his soul; that is, he is endowed with strength to face all adversities. By overcoming himself he becomes master of himself. By burning his own ego and forgetting about himself, he comes out unscathed from the struggle. By conquering himself in his pleasures, he makes himself invincible to setbacks.

Since Eliphaz had insulted and reviled him, Job added this exhortation on the value of patience: “*Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed?*”

Eliphaz Is Right in Condemning an Angry Temper

Anger kills a fool, and envy slays the simple (Job 5:2).

[Moral interpretation]

This sentence would have come true if not delivered against such a patient man. The statement is correct, although it was unjust for Eliphaz to use it against Blessed Job. But let us leave this argument aside and focus on the weight of its truth.

It is written, “You, Lord, judge with serenity” (Wis 12:18). As often as we restrain from thoughts of revenge and motions of wrath, and foster the virtue of meekness, we are trying to imitate our Creator. Anger shatters our peace of mind. Torn and rent, our mind is thrown into confusion so that it is not in harmony with itself. Anger takes away that inward likeness we have with God.

Anger is a great sin that makes us depart from meekness and serenity; the image of the Most High in us is destroyed. Anger also destroys wisdom; we are left wholly in ignorance about what to do, how, or in what order. It dims the light of understanding and leaves the mind agitated with confusion. Thus, it is written, “Anger resides in the lap of the fool” (Qo 7:9).

“Anger destroys even the wise” (Prov 15:1 Vulg.). Anger destroys the life of the soul, even though some wisdom seems to be retained. If the mind gets to discern something with good judgement, it will never execute it, being in a state of confusion.

Anger results in abandoning the struggle to seek sanctity. “Man’s anger does not bring about the sanctity of life that God desires” (Jas 1:20). While the mind is agitated with anger, our reason falsely judges to be right whatever his rage suggests.

All kindness and good manners of social life are lost with anger. Thus, we are told: “Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared” (Prov 22:24-25). And, “Who can dwell with a man whose spirit is ready to wrath?” (Prov 18:14 Vulg.).

Reason is given to man to dominate his feelings and emotions. Whoever does not regulate them deserves to live alone like a beast.

Anger interrupts social harmony. We read, “A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient one calms a quarrel” (Prov 15:18). An angry man makes a sinner go deeper into his sin; a bad man becomes worse if provoked to quarrel.

Anger darkens the light of truth, as we read, “In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry” (Eph 4:26). Wrath

swathes the mind with the darkness of agitation. The brightness of God's knowledge remains veiled for a man shrouded with this gloom; man cannot see God's will in the ordinary events.

The light of the Holy Spirit is also shut out from an angry person. The contrary happens to a calm person. "Upon whom shall my Spirit rest, but upon him who is humble and peaceful in spirit, and trembles at my word?" (Is 66:2). God says *upon the humble* and adds, and *the peaceful*. Anger steals away the peace of mind; the soul no longer is a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Void by the Spirit's departure, the soul is carried away into open frenzy. Unable to think in depth, it acquires a shallow attitude.

Anger Expels the Holy Spirit and Overpowers Reason

Inflamed with the sting of anger, the heart beats quick, the body trembles, the tongue stammers, the face reddens, and the eyes grow fierce. One is no longer recognizable. The mouth emits sounds, but these are not controlled by the understanding. Unconscious of his own doings, an angry man is like a mentally retarded person.

The mind surrenders itself to the power of another. Free from the control of reason, anger grows bolder; it affects even the hands. Man deals blows outside, but his mind is kept captive of frenzy, the mistress of his limbs.

Anger turns the tongue into a dart of cursing. The wicked man demands a brother's destruction, and asks God to do that, because he is either afraid or ashamed to do so for himself. By wish and words he commits murder, even if he avoids hurting his neighbor with his hands.

Silent Anger

Sometimes the mind is disturbed with anger, but with a kind of anger that commands silence. Outwardly this anger does not flare up through the lips, but inwardly it burns the worse. Thus, the angry man stops talking to his neighbors; by saying nothing, he expresses how much he hates them. Often this rigorous silence is used to cover a relaxation of the discipline, but only if it is not noticed exteriorly.

If the angry man does not change his ways, in the progress of time he puts out completely his love for neighbor. Sharper stings arise in his mind; occasions, too, spring up that aggravate his irritation. The speck of sawdust in the angry man's eye becomes a plank as anger is transformed into hatred.

Pent up within the heart, this silent anger burns more fiercely. In the confine of his mind the angry man frames clamorous speeches, concocts

reasons that exasperate his wrath, and finally judges cruelly on the case. Solomon expressed this process thus: "The expectation of the wicked ends only in wrath" (Prov 11:23). With his external silence, this troubled man faces internally a loud riot; the flames of his pent-up anger prey on him grievously. As a wise man said: "The thoughts of an angry man are a brood of vipers; they devour the mind which is their mother."

Kinds of Anger

Some are promptly inflamed with anger, but they quickly calm down. Others are slow in getting excited, but their anger lingers on for long.

The first kind of men are like burning reeds; they shout with their voices and give out something like a crackle at their kindling. They speedily rise into flames, but also rapidly cool down into ashes.

The second kind are like heavy hardwood; they are slow in catching on fire, but once kindled, they are put out only with difficulty. They stir themselves slowly into the heat of passion, but retain longer the fire of their rage.

There is a third kind of men; their conduct is worse. They are both quick in catching the flames of anger, and slow in letting them go.

Finally, there is a fourth kind of men. They get angry slowly and calm down quickly.

Anyone can see that the fourth kind of anger, better than the first, gets closer to the excellence of peace of mind. The evil in the third is worse than in the second.

Two Remedies for Anger

What is the advantage of describing how anger takes possession of the mind if I do not explain how it should be checked?

There are two ways to relax the hold of anger over the mind. The first method is to have a thoughtful mind. First of all, the thoughtful man sets before him all the insults that he is liable to undergo, and compares them with heinous treatment given to his Redeemer. Thus, he braces himself to face contradiction. When contradiction comes, he confronts it with courage. The more thoughtfully he armed himself with foresight, the greater his courage in the struggle.

One caught by adversity without this preparation and foresight is as one found sleeping by his enemy. He offers no resistance. His enemy stabs and dispatches him at once.

One who forecasts the impending dangers with earnest thoughtfulness is—as it were—lying in ambush, waiting for the assault of the enemy. He is arrayed in strength for the victory in the same point that he was expected to be caught by surprise. Thus, before the outset of any action, the mind should forecast the difficulties and problems. Armed against them with the breastplate of patience, this man will win whatever attack may take place.

The second method to preserve meekness is to keep an eye on our own offenses when we look at the transgressions of others. The consideration of our failures in similar situations will help us to excuse the offenses done to us. We will bear with patience an injury if we remember that often others need to exercise patience in dealing with us. The recollection of our own faults will calm the rage rising up in the mind like fire extinguished by water. One who acknowledges having committed offenses against God or his neighbor tends to forgive offenses done to him.

Even Just Anger Disturbs the Mind

We must distinguish between anger stirred by bad temper, and one originated from zeal. The first comes from evil, the second from good.

By anger coming from good, Phinehas died by the sword on the day of God's visitation (cf. 1 Sam). Eli lacked such anger to correct the immoral conduct of his sons, and he deserved to be punished by the Most High. He reaped the severity of the Eternal Ruler waxing hot against him, in the same proportion as he was lukewarm to correct the evil practices of those under his charge.

The psalmist says, "Be angry, and do not sin" (Ps 4:5 Vulg.). Some misinterpret this admonition. They say that we should be angry toward ourselves, but not toward the others, likewise, when they sin. That is wrong. If we are told to love our neighbor as ourselves, it follows that we should be angry at their erring ways as much as with our own evil practices.

Solomon tells us, "Anger is better than laughter, because a sad face makes the heart better" (Qo 7:3). And the psalmist, "My eye is disturbed because of anger" (Ps 6:8 Vulg.). Anger coming from evil blinds the mind, but anger coming from zeal only disturbs it. The world of contemplation can only be known by a heart in tranquillity.

The heart is broken up even by anger coming from zeal for virtue. For this zeal fills the mind with unrest and agitation, and dims the power of perception. In this troubled state, the mind no longer sees objects far above, as it clearly saw them during the state of tranquillity. But after this moment

of blindness, the mind is soon brought high, with a more penetrating vision. The same zeal for what is right that closed the mind with perturbation now opens for it wider scenes of eternity in a state of tranquillity. The same zeal that prevented the mind from seeing now makes it gain ground, seeing clearer, in a more genuine way. Likewise, ointment applied to the diseased eye blinds it temporarily. But after a moment, the eye recovers its vision and sees better.

These states of perturbation and contemplation do not stay at the same time. The sun's rays cannot be seen when passing clouds cover the sky; an agitated pond does not reflect the image of the beholder until it becomes clear and tranquil. Likewise, a disturbed mind cannot contemplate the eternal truths until it reaches a tranquil state. The more the water quivers, the more it distorts the appearance of the beholder.

Anger May Be Useful, But It Must Not Rule

Anger may be an instrument of virtue. But when the spirit is stirred with zeal, one must not allow that same anger to gain dominion over the mind. Anger should not rule like a mistress, but obey like a handmaid. It should render a service, never separate from reason. The more it is subjected to reason, the higher is lifted up against evil.

An excessive anger—even though coming from a right cause—can master over our mind and disobey reason. Taking hot temper as a good quality, it multiplies itself beyond control. Thus, a person with zeal for the right should see that his anger does not overleap the control of the mind.

On the contrary, to avenge sin, he should check the rising agitation of his mind, regulate his anger with skill, restrain the heat of temper, control his passions and emotions, and look for the best time and manner to accomplish it. All this should be done in subjection to the mind and under the rule of equity. Thus, the punisher of another man is more just, the more he is the conqueror of himself. One correcting the faults of others should first advance in self-restraint, and examine the intention of his own passion. Thus, he will not go astray immoderately stirred by his zeal for the right cause.

Thus, even anger coming from the right cause troubles the perception of the mind, “for wrath kills the foolish man.” Or, as it is said, “Anger from zeal disturbs the wise; anger from sin destroys the fool.” The first kind remains under the control of reason, the second lords over the prostrated mind in opposition to reason.

Different Virtues Needed against Different Attacks by Satan

In famine he will ransom you from death, and in battle from the stroke of the sword. You will be protected from the lash of the tongue, and need not fear when destruction comes (Job 5:20-21).

Holy men are never afraid. They know that they are engaged against an adversary attacking from different fronts and using various tactics. They arm themselves with adequate weapons against each assault. Against famine and poverty, they have the sustenance of God's word. Against the sword of impurity, they use the shield of continence. Against the scourge of the slanderous tongue, they have the defense of patience. Against external calamities, they have the help of inner love.

The more manifold are the temptations that the cunning enemy brings against him, the richer in virtues is the soldier of Christ rendered.

Corrective Character of Pain

Even if God crushed me, let loose his hand and cut me off! Then I will still have this consolation—my joy in unrelenting anguish—that afflicting me with pain He has not spared me (Job 6:9-10).

[Moral interpretation]

A Christian who has sinned tries to find a way to atone for his sins. He examines his life. If he realizes that he has met no afflictions in return for those evil deeds, he will begin to be alarmed with fear and misgivings. He will suspect that grace may have forsaken him forever.

In this life, it is not safe to receive recompense for one's faults. At the end, the suspended punishment will fall in heavier measure. Thus, we should be eager to be stricken with the correction of our Father's hand. The pain of the wound is medicine for health.

Thus, it is said, "This is my consolation, that by afflicting me with grief he has not spared me." As if saying: "God spares people here from affliction, but they will receive punishment for ever and ever. May he strike me here, may he not spare me here, so that he will spare me forever. I console myself for being afflicted—I know the rottenness of human nature. By being wounded my hope grows, I am assured of eternal happiness."

Patience, the Strength of a Christian

What strength do I have, that I should still hope? What prospects, that I should be patient? (Job 6:11).

The *strength* of the people who try to please God is of one kind, and the *strength* of sinners is of another. The strength of Christians is:

- to subdue the flesh,
- to thwart our own will,
- to annihilate the gratifications of the present life,
- to be in love with the difficulties of this life for the sake of eternal rewards,
- to be detached from the allurements of prosperity, and,
- to overcome the fear of adversity.

The strength of sinners is:

- to have their affection set on transitory things,
- to hold out insensibly against the blows of misfortune coming from our Creator,
- never to be detached from the love of temporal things, not even in the face of adversity,
- to set their goal in life on the attainment of vainglory, even with the waste of their life,
- to try out larger measures of wickedness, or new, more intense, vices,
- to attack the life of those who are consistent with their Christian vocation, not only with words and deeds, but even with weapons,
- to put their trust in themselves,
- to commit sin daily, without any decrease in their zest for evil.

Holy Men Do Not Suffer for Worldly Ends

Sinners take great pain in running after the concupiscence of this world. They expose themselves to perils, welcome insults for the sake of gain, never give up from the lust of their appetites, not even in the face of strong opposition, and for the sake of the world defy the difficulties of the world. They toil with greater determination the greater the prospects of worldly enjoyment. This unreasonable love for the present life is not the right kind of strength that generates patience; it is blindness.

On the other hand, Blessed Job exclaimed, "What strength do I have, that I should still hope? What prospects, that I should be patient?" A holy man is not willing to confront the difficulties of this world for the world's sake; he does not have strength for that. He seeks his own supernatural end and realizes how transitory the present life is. He refuses to suffer pain and be patient for merely a temporary end.

Patience Is Not to Be Insensitive Like a Stone

Do I have the strength of stone? Is my flesh bronze? (Job 6:12)

“Stone” and “bronze” here refer to the hearts of the insensate. They often receive strokes of fortune from the Most High, and do not realize that these are warnings from God. They are not softened by these calls to conversion.

On the other hand, God addresses these words to the chosen ones, who obey him: “I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh” (Ez 11:19). And St Paul also says, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have no charity, I am only a resounding brass or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor 13:1).

When struck, stones do not give a clear sound; bronze, on the other hand, emits a vibrant tone. The sound of stones is without timbre or quality, lifeless. Some men, like stones, have become extremely hardened toward the duties imposed by God. Hit by adversity—the stroke of God proving them—they never return the clear sound of a humble confession.

Some others are like bronze. Smitten by the Most High, they emit the clear sound of a good confession. But, like that of a metal, this sound is not a tone of humility coming from the heart. As soon as the trouble disappears, they forget their good resolutions and return to the primitive state.

The first kind of persons, like stones, give no tones at all. They refuse words, prayer, and worship to God.

The second kind of people, like bronze under the stroke, utter good things that they do not feel. Promising what they never fulfil, they cry out without any life.

Thus a holy man avoids the hardness of sinners and exclaims, “I do not have the strength of stone, nor is my flesh like bronze.”

Blessed Job is telling us that he is weak to pursue earthly goods for their own sake, but strong and patient to pursue the goods that matter for eternal life.

Job continues revealing to us the root of his strength and patience to endure. He knows that he would be running to death if he ascribed to himself the powers he has.

Very often a stagnant virtue, which does not grow, kills worse than if it were totally lacking. While it uplifts the mind with self-confidence, it pierces it with self-complacency. And while it invigorates the soul with strength, it slays it with self-praise. This freak virtue destroys the soul,

instilling a shallow self-trust and uprooting trust in one's interior strength given by God.

A Friend Who Fails in Adversity Is a False Friend

Blessed Job was rich in virtue; he did not have confidence in his own powers. Thus he says:

Do I have any power to help myself, now that success has been driven from me? A despairing man should have the devotion of his friends. Those who do not have pity for a friend forsake the fear of the Almighty (Job 6:13-14).

This stricken man looked for hope. He looked for it in himself, and found only weakness. He looked for it in the others, but he finds that "My friends also departed from me."

Yet, he found a greater source of hope and strength. Despised without, he is seated on a throne of judgment within. Thus, he declares: "Those who do not have pity for a friend forsake the fear of the Almighty."

A friend is a faithful person united to us whom we are glad to serve. He helps us reach the eternal country. Love of God and love of neighbor go hand in hand; friendship should serve to increase the love of God.

On the other hand, the love of God grows in strength by the love of neighbor, as St John testifies, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen" (1 Jn 4:20).

Sometimes the Lord wants to make known how far people are from his love and from his neighbor's love. Regulating all things with a marvelous order, God puts down some by blows of misfortune, and sets up others by successes. He leaves some in dire straits to show the evil that lurks in the hearts of certain others. For very often the persons that courted us in time of prosperity persecute us in time of distress.

When a prosperous person is loved, it is doubtful whether his fortune or the individual himself is the object of love. But the loss of fortune puts to the test the mettle of the affection. Thus Scripture says, "A friend cannot be known in prosperity, an enemy cannot remain hidden in adversity" (Qo 12:8). The first is often hidden, awed by the glitter of high fortune; the latter is disclosed encroaching on us during adverse conditions.

It is said, "Those who do not have pity for a friend, forsake the fear of the Almighty." For one who despises his neighbor on account of his

misfortune clearly shows that he never loved him during the time of prosperity.

God smites some, both, to discipline the person stricken, and to give a chance for doing good to those who are not stricken. Whoever disregards one who is downtrodden wastes an occasion of virtue, and sets himself against his Maker. He implicitly accuses God of being unjust for wounding another, and fails to show his gratitude for being spared.

Earthly Fears, the Way to Eternal Danger

The wicked disappear easily and swiftly to the depths of their misery. Not minding the eternal punishment, they avoid the crosses in the little things. They set themselves against the will of God. Thus, it is said:

My brothers have passed me by like a brook that passes by rapidly down the gorge. Over those who dread the frost, the snow rushes down (Job 6:15-16).

Frost solidifies down here. Snow falls from above. Analogously, there are persons who fear temporal adversity exceedingly; they expose themselves to a more severe eternal punishment.

The psalmist says: "There they are, overwhelmed with dread, where no fear was" (Ps 14:5). A man may desire to defend the truth with freedom; but, afraid of the indignation of a human power, he may give up this desire. He is afraid of a man opposed to the truth, and so incurs the wrath of Truth in heaven. Another man wants to help the needy with his wealth to atone for his sins, but he is afraid that he may need the resources he is giving away. With his worry about the future, he is starving his soul from the nourishment of mercy. Fearing want on earth, he cuts himself off from the eternal riches and joy. Thus it is said, "Over those who fear the frost, the snow rushes down."

They will cease to flow in the dry season, and in the heat vanish from their channels (Job 6:17).

All those too much concerned for the present life are brought to nothing when they lose it. Disregarding the eternal realities, they had been cut off from them even during this present life. Thus, it is added, "In the heat they will vanish from their channels."

As the day of Judgment approaches, the wicked man becomes hot with the awareness of the impending punishment. He is, then, severed from the consolations of this life, to which he had clung for so long. "The understanding of this message will bring sheer terror" (Is 28:19).

A Patient Man Prepares Himself for Everlasting Happiness

When the short period of the present life is loved as if it were to last for long, the soul is beguiled with material objects, unable to focus on the eternal realities. Deprived of eternal hope, the soul is thrown down to the blackness of despair. Imagining that this period will go on indefinitely, at once the soul meets that eternity which it cannot avoid.

A wise man said, “Woe to you who have lost patience” (Qo 2:14). Those who are lost tarrying among human consolations *have lost their patience*. They have parted with the hope of the invisible realities. While their mind is riveted to temporal realities, life is ended. They are suddenly brought to unimagined punishments. In their presumptuous expectations—they flattered themselves—they thought these punishments would never come or not till much later.

It is unmeasurable what follows, and too little what is led to an end. It should not seem to us too long what sooner or later will disappear. It only goes by moments; and each moment urges us to go on with patience. Thus a patient man has his eyes fixed on the shortness of life, and prepares himself for the things that last.

Wise Foolishness of the Saints; They Fear No Man

Teach me, and I will be quiet; show me where I have been wrong. (Job 6:24)

[Moral interpretation]

Blessed Job is talking to God, asking him to show him his ways, requesting his wisdom. Job had undergone the loss of property; he was given over to the power of the evil spirits; he was suffering from the pain of his wounds. Yet, he was wise in loving the *foolishness of God*, and treading underfoot the foolish wisdom of the world. In opposition to the rich of this world, he is called poor; in opposition to the powerful, he is called oppressed; in opposition to the wise, he is called a fool.

He answered the three with patience. Poor, yet he did not seek their money; oppressed, yet he sought their aid against the strong; a fool, yet he did not seek the discernment of the earthly wisdom.

A holy patient man is carried off above himself in spirit. Poor, but he is not crushed by want; oppressed, but he is not suffering anything; made a fool by his own will, but he does not gaze with admiration at carnal wisdom.

Consider those chosen by God suffering from oppression without; they are a fortress within. They are not fools running after earthly wisdom. Poor, yet they do not suffer want. Oppressed, they lament nothing.

Scripture says, “God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong” (1 Cor 1:27). Also, “Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a ‘fool’ so that he may become wise” (1 Cor 3:18). And, manifesting the wealth of voluntary detachment from riches, Scripture says about them, “Known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything” (2 Cor 6:9-10).

All those high and exalted without secretly are groveling with contempt for themselves. In their interior pride, they are transported high above themselves. But all they find in this life are passing realities.

Patience in Suffering United to Active Charity

Fulfill what you have begun; give ear, and see if I lie (Job 6:28).

Holy men are never afraid of being accused of falsehoods; they are never so much harmed that they lose their peace and depart from the truth. With loving affection they even call to God their persecutors.

Thus it is said, “Fulfill what you have begun,” because holy people endure adversity. And, “Give ear, and see if I lie,” because they never keep the Truth—God—away from their detractors. It is as if saying, “I do not tremble at the harm done to me. I do not stop correcting and helping ungrateful listeners to be converted and get closer to God. I do this even while I am suffering misfortune and persecuted.

In this war of temptations, the mind of the saints is defended by the shield of patience, and begirt with the sword of charity. Thus, men seeking sanctity find determination to endure bad treatment, and kindness to recompense good. They valiantly resist the weapons of the enemy with the shield and attack him with the sword of charity.

One does not go to war armed only with a sword, but without a shield; or protected by a shield, but without a sword. Thus, a soldier of God, going to this daily war which is Christian life, must cover himself with the shield of patience, or else he will perish. Besides, he must wield the sword of charity, engage the enemy, lunge, and win the victory by bringing him closer to the Truth, closer to God.

St Paul said it briefly, “Charity suffers long, and is kind” (1 Cor 13:4). Patience and kindness; when one of them is missing, charity is lacking. One bearing his neighbor without patience neglects the duty of charity; one bearing his neighbor without kindness has no love. Thus, to have true charity, one needs patience supporting kindness, and kindness accompanying patience. To build the castle of our interior life we need patience to give support and strength to the tower of kindness; the tower of kindness will give grace to the firmly founded edifice of patience. Thus, Blessed Job, prompted by patience, added, “But fulfill what you have began.” And kindness made him say, “Give ear, and see if I lie.”

Man’s Life since the Fall, a Trial and Warfare

The life of man upon earth is warfare (Job 7:1).

[Moral interpretation]

In this passage in the Septuagint translation, the life of man is not called *a warfare*, but *a test*—or “temptation” *peirath_rion*. The words differ but the meaning is concordant. The word “test” refers to our contest against the evil spirits; the word “warfare” refers to our combat against our enemy. The test is, in itself, “a warfare”; while man is watching against the plots of the enemy, he is also under arms for the battle.

Notice that it does not say that man will *have* “tests” in his life, but that his life will *be* a “test.”

Using his free will, man refused the upright state in which he was created, and was made a slave, subject to the rottenness of his state of corruption. Out of the original state of justice, he keeps on increasing his sins.

Man’s mind is wounded. Trying to erect himself by seeking things on high, he directly drops down again under the compulsion of his slippery changeableness. He desires to stand up in contemplation, but he has no strength. He tries to fix firmly his thoughts on things that matter, but he is enfeebled by the slipping of his frailty.

Man’s will is also wounded, for he chose this state out of free will. He could have possessed his powers and appetites in tranquillity, as his Maker created him, but he did not want to be possessed by Him. Thus, as he aimed to lift himself against his Maker, he straightway felt the undertow of his insolent flesh.

At birth, every man inherited the *guilt* [*culpa* in Latin] of sin, together with the corresponding *punishment*. Thus, we are born with the engrafted

evil of a frail nature, inclined to sin. We carry an enemy within us; we can defeat him only after resolute fight. Thus, the life of man is a “test” because he has to conquer himself; or else, he is destroyed. Virtue continuously cuts down what the principle of evil begets—the bad inclinations leading to sin. And, again, the principle of evil within us continuously trims the generous suggestions of virtue.

Temptations as Seemingly Contrary Duties

Our life on earth is a “test,” even if we normally refrain from committing mortal sin; our good works themselves are clouded by the recollection of evil deeds, the attraction of sinful actions, and the failure to fulfil our good resolutions.

Even if a man refrains from sins of the flesh, he is still assailed by impure thoughts; past faults pop up in his mind and he has to fight against them. What was pleasure is now punishment. Fearing to be drawn again into the conquered bad habit, he mortifies his appetite by means of vigilance over his senses, fast, and abstinence. But his mortified life is noticed, his friends praise him, and vainglory enters his mind. He now is fighting in two fronts: vainglory and his old bad habits.

Another man conquers pride and lives now the virtue of humility sincerely. Seeing people full of pride oppress the innocent, he becomes inflamed with zeal, lays aside in some degree his good resolutions, and displays a defiant attitude. He confronts the oppressor not with persuasion but with violence. Thus, he may either heed the zeal for the right and abandon the practice of humility, or maintain humility and do nothing for the others. He is torn between following violent methods in pursuing his ideal, and a false humility, which results in lack of personal commitment to help the others. Soon he admits that either alternative is inconsistent with a serious Christian life, and he is embarrassed. The dilemma may lead him either to mask his pride with a violent zeal, or to feign humility and fall into timid inactivity.

Considering the malice of the sin of deceit, another man determines to fortify himself in the citadel of truth, stop any false word coming out of his lips, and live well the virtue of sincerity. But it often happens that our neighbor is harmed when the truth is revealed. Thus, out of compassion, the person may be brought back to the old habit of deceit; the shadow of falsehood dims the rays of truth. He is, then, torn between telling lies that slay his own soul, and saying the truth that harms his neighbor.

Out of love of God, another person makes the resolution of praying and meditating. But while engaged in mental prayer, sinful images arise in his mind which he has to fight continuously. Exhausted by his own weakness he may eventually either give up mental prayer and fall into sloth, or continue the fight against his disorderly imagination.

Thus, man must be patient and fight incessantly because “the life of man upon the earth is a test.”

Man’s Life Is Short, the Reward Is Beyond It

But it is also said that the life of man is “warfare.” It means that there is daily progress toward an end. As warfare goes on in a regular course, the time of fighting gets shorter, and eventually the war ends. Man is constantly advancing toward the end of his life. Each step the traveler advances is one step less left on his way ahead. Likewise, man looks for days to come around, but one more day that lengthens his life is one day less in his life to come. It is added:

Are not his days also like the days of a hired man? (Job 7:1)

The Chosen Ones Labor to Ensure Their Reward

The hired man wants his days to pass quickly to obtain the sooner the reward of his work. The days of a man imbued with knowledge of the eternal realities and love for the Truth are like the days of a hired man. This man reckons the present life as his *road*, not his *country*; a *warfare*, not the *palm of victory*. He sees himself drifting away from his reward when he slows down in reaching his end.

The hired man spends his strength in working for somebody else, while he gets the reward for himself. Our Redeemer said, “My kingdom is not of this world” (Jn 18:36). All of us with the hope of heaven wear ourselves out toiling in the present life, while our concern is for the other life. We are duty-bound to serve the interests of the world by working in earnest, and give back to the world what belongs to it. We are, then, as if working for another man. Yet, we hope to receive a reward of our own. If we manage well the interests of this world, we will receive our payment.

Conversely, God tells the reprobate, “If you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you any property of your own?” (Lk 16:12).

Moreover, the hired man seeks to fill every day with work, so that he will not be short of turnout—and the corresponding reward—at the end of time. He works in earnest because he thinks of the recompense. The

assurance of a big reward is increased when his work advances; his hope sickens when his work is at a stand-still. Similarly, a good Christian reckons his life “as the days of a hired man.” He sees himself closer to the reward—his supernatural hope increases—the more steadily he advances in work. He is afraid of having a void day, without toil.

A holy man rejoices in adversity, is encouraged by suffering, and is comforted more thoroughly the more he devotes himself to his daily tasks. Thus, the chosen ones say to God: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered” (Ps 44:22). And St Paul proclaims, “I die every day—I mean that, brothers—just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord” (1 Cor 15:31). And again, “That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day” (2 Tim 1:12).

The Hardships of This Life Make Us Look Forward to Heaven

A Christian entrusts all his labors to the Truth; he keeps the pledges of His recompense shut up in the chamber of hope. He bears today’s suffocating heat under toil, to have rest one day in refreshment. Thus, it is added:

Like a slave longing for the evening shadows, or a hired man waiting eagerly for his wages, so I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me. (Job 7:2-3).

For a slave “to long for the evening shadows” after the heat of the daily work and the sweat of labor is to seek the cool of everlasting happiness. Thus, the servant of the psalms says, “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” (Ps 42:2). Wanting to get hold of this “shadow,” St Paul said, “I desire to depart and be with Christ” (Phil 1:23).

The one who desires the “shadow” is called “a servant,” because each Christian, so long as he is in the present life, is held under the yoke of corruption, the devil exercises a certain dominion over him. Thus, St Paul said that, “The creature itself will be liberated from its bondage of decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom 8:21).

Everyone is now oppressed by the penalty of a corrupt state, but later the elect will be exalted high to the glory of eternal happiness. As it were, overcoming and surmounting his initial condition of servant, the creature will receive the glory of the children of God, united to God by the Spirit.

Hardships Are Bearable for the Reward's Sake

Meanwhile everyone is subject to the heat of temptation, to the yoke of our wretched condition, as that of “*a hired man waiting eagerly for his wages.*”

When a hired man looks at the work to be done, he is annoyed by the load and length of it. But when he recalls the recompense waiting for him, his sinking spirit recovers vigor and freshness, and he goes to his task.

Likewise, a Christian may find crosses in his life, insults upon his good name, losses of his substance, and pain in his body. All these seem light when he stretches the eyes of his mind to heaven. Unbearable pain is rendered tolerable when he considers the recompense.

St Paul declared that his suffering was a heavy burden, but he regarded it light in view of the reward. “I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked” (2 Cor 11:23,25-27).

He even declared, “We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life” (2 Cor 1:8).

But St Paul wiped off the sweat of his hard toil with the towel of the reward, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18).

Want and Suffering, a Holy Man's Lot

It is added, *so I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me.* (Job 7:2-3).

Those who serve the Creator of all things often lack necessary things. They who hold fast to God by love do not enjoy the approval of men in the present life. They who do not work to get a human applause seemingly live “months of futility.” The saints, like hired men, spend “months of futility” because they bear the toil now but do not receive the payment until later.

They also spend “nights of misery” because they bear adversity up to the point of suffering want and even illness in the body. A virtuous man

endures contempt and want easier than pain in his flesh. The saints count their “nights of misery” because they maintain a struggle in their flesh to curb illicit pleasures as long as they live the present life. A person who does not aim to advance in the spirit finds the things of this world less galling.

God Will Ask for an Account of the Use of His Gifts

What is man that you make so much of him, that you give him so much attention, that you visit him every morning at dawn and test him suddenly? Will you never look away from me, or let me alone even for an instant? (Job 7:17-19).

[Literal interpretation]

We call *dawn* the moments when the night term begins to change into the brightness of light. We are hemmed in the darkness of night when dimmed by corruption. But our night is turned into light when *God visits us*. The darkness of our erring state is illuminated by the knowledge of the Truth, and the splendor of grace lights up our heart blinded by sin.

St Paul saw a change in the Christians’ heart when he said, “The night is nearly over; the day is almost here” (Rom 13:12). Our Lord “visits us at dawn” when he illumines the darkness of our error with the light of the knowledge of Himself. He uplifts us with the gift of contemplation, and exalts us to the fortress of virtue.

God *tests man suddenly*. Drawing near to us, He advances our souls to virtuous heights. Withdrawing Himself, He allows man to be assaulted with temptation. If, after being enriched with grace, man were never subject to temptation, the soul could boast that it has this strength of itself.

God illumines our mind and enriches our soul with virtues; even then, filthy imaginations create disorder in our soul. The soul enjoys the security of a high state, and suddenly, it is tempted so that it can humbly acknowledge its infirmity. Thus, the soul is lifted up by grace, and, with the withdrawal of the same, sees what it really is.

By his words alone, Elijah, favored by God, opened the gates of heaven to send rain over Israel. Yet, “tried suddenly,” he fled to the desert scared of a single woman. St Paul was carried to the third heaven and contemplated the secrets of Paradise, but, when he returned to himself, he had to fight against the assaults of the flesh, subject to another law in his members.

Our Lord “visits us at dawn,” but, after this visit, he “tries us suddenly” seemingly leaving us to ourselves.

Bad Men Praise God Only While They Prosper

Then Bildad the Shuhite replied: “How long will you say such things? Your words are a blustering wind. Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right? When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin (Job 8:1-4).

Job did not speak against God’s justice, or ignore it by remaining in silence.

On the other hand, brazen persons speak with big words, even well-known truths, to appear learned. They do not hold their peace and remain in a modest silence. They fear that their silence may be interpreted as ignorance.

These arrogant people praise the rectitude of God’s justice only when blows are dealt to other men, and they enjoy security from trouble; when others are harassed with adversity, and they experience prosperity in their business.

They do wickedly, yet they think they are righteous. They imagine that the prosperity they enjoy is due to their own merits. They think that God always sends good fortune or hardships in direct proportion to the someone’s merits or lack of them. And they evidence their righteousness and merits with their success in human affairs.

But if God’s power of correction touches them, even slightly, they will break loose against this decision of the divine providence. Before, while unharmed, they were all admiration and praise for God’s judgment. Now that God’s judgment is at odds with their own ways, they deny that that judgment is just. Daring to rate the fairness of God’s decisions, they explode in contradictory charges. Punished by God because they have done wrong, they do even worse. As the psalmist says of the sinners, “They will praise you, Lord, when they prosper” (Ps 49:18). The voice of praise is to be disregarded when it is shaped by the joy of prosperity. The confession of God’s glory has merit when it comes from one in pain, when adversity—the test of one’s right intention—sharpens the sentence of his lips.

It was easy for Bildad to commend God’s justice when he experienced no adversity in his life.

The Patient Man Is Not Shattered by Misfortune

The following excerpts give us a Christian outlook on patience in time of adversity and tribulations.

Even if he kills me I shall hope in him. And I shall rise from the earth on the last day (Job 13:15).

[Literal interpretation]

The virtue of patience is never to the fore in times of prosperity and happiness, but is to be tested in times of trial. Exhausted by adversity, the truly patient person is not deflected from the straight path of his hope.

The thoughts of the impatient and false man are thus described in Scripture: “He will praise you when you bring him benefits” (Ps 49:18 Vulg.).

The difference between the just and the unjust heart is seen in this, that the just utters praise of almighty God even in adversity. He is not shattered together with his possessions, he does not tumble with the fall of his external reputation, but shows by his greater strength without possessions what he was like when he had them.

At least understand that God has afflicted me with an unfair judgement (Job 19:6).

[Literal interpretation]

How harsh are the words of the just man smitten by blows! They are forced out of him not by pride but by grief. But the just man does not abandon justice at the hour of pain. Because the blessed Job had a gentle heart, he did not sin even when speaking harshly.

If we say that he sinned in using these words, we acknowledge that the devil achieved his design when he said, “Touch his bone and flesh, and see if he will curse you to your face” (Job 2:5). So a serious problem arises, for if Job did not sin when he said, “At least understand that God has afflicted me with an unfair judgement,” we agree that God did something unjustly, which it is sacrilegious to claim. But if Job did sin, the devil fulfilled his promise.

We must accordingly demonstrate that God treated the blessed Job rightly, yet that Job did not lie when he said that he was afflicted by God’s unfair judgement, but that the enemy lied when he predicted the guilt of the blessed man.

Sometimes the statements of good men are considered base because they are not pondered in their inner meaning. The blessed Job had considered his life and weighed the stripes which he suffered, and he saw that it was unjust that he should receive such punishment for such a life.

When he said that he was afflicted with an unfair judgment, he was saying openly what the Lord had said about him in his secret heart to his enemy: “You have incited me against him to ruin him without any reason” (Job 2:3). So how did Job sin when he said nothing which was at odds with the statement of the Creator?

By Not Showing His Judgment, God Seemed Not to Judge

Behold I shall cry, suffering violence, and none shall hear, I shall cry aloud, and there is none to judge (Job 19:7).

Almighty God knows what can be of benefit to us; he pretends not to hear us when we are in pain, so that he may increase what is in our interest. He seeks to purify our lives by punishment, so that we may seek elsewhere that peaceful repose which cannot be found in this world. But there are some even of the faithful who are unaware of this grace which lies in God’s ordering of events.

Job speaks in their person when he says here; “Behold I shall cry, suffering violence, and none shall hear: I shall cry aloud, and there is none to judge.” What is being suggested is that there is none to judge our cause against the foe except God who does so judge. But postponement of judgement does not mean absence of it, for when the blessed Job said this, both the merits of that holy man and the punishment of the foe were increasing. It is at the discretion of the Judge to postpone the judgement. But the economy which God justly ordains in secret is one thing, and what the human heart bruised with scourging openly requests is another. So Job further says about the infliction of these blows:

He has hedged my path round about, and I cannot pass; and in my way he has set darkness (Job 19:8).

He saw his path hedged about with blows when he sought to pass to an untroubled state, but he could not escape the whips. Because he saw that he was being beaten when he did not regard his manner of life deserving it; he experienced the darkness of ignorance in the way of his heart, for he could not penetrate the reason for his being scourged. This can quite appropriately be applied also to weak members of holy Church.

For I know that my Redeemer lives (Job 19:25).

Job says not “Creator” but “Redeemer,” so he openly proclaims him who after he created all things appeared among us in the flesh to redeem us from captivity, and by his passion freed us from eternal death. We must

observe the depth of Job's faith. Job commits himself entirely to the Godhead of whom Paul says: "Though he was crucified in his weakness, he lives by the power of God" (2 Cor 13:4).

Job says: "I know that my Redeemer lives," as if he were clearly saying: "Even a man without faith would know that Jesus was scourged, mocked, beaten with the palms of the hands, crowned with thorns, smeared with spittle, crucified, and dead. But I believe with unwavering faith that he lives after death; I confess with free utterance that my Redeemer, who perished at the hands of the ungodly, lives on."

With this sentence Blessed Job announces in clear tones, our sure belief in the resurrection of our own flesh, which will arise through Christ's Resurrection.

There follows: *And I shall rise from the earth on the last day* (Job 19:25).

God will at some time resurrect us as he resurrected. For he has promised us that we, too, will resurrect with him, since we—his limbs—should follow the glory of the Head.

Our Redeemer accepted death so that we should not fear to die. He resurrected so that we may be sure that we can rise again. That is why he decided that his death should last for no more than three days, so that we would not fall into despair if his own resurrection were delayed for long.

The prophet well said of him: "He will drink from the brook on his way, and he shall therefore raise his head high" (Ps 110:7). He has deigned to drink of the river of our suffering, so to say, not by halting but by continuing on his way; for he met death "on his way," that is for three days. And he did not continue in the death which he experienced, as we shall until the end of the world.

PART THREE

POINTERS ON PATIENCE

7

Our Lord's Patience

The Patience of Our Lord

Jesus is the model of patience we should imitate. He lived this virtue throughout his life. But especially during his passion and death, our Lord gave us an example of patience, of being fully identified with the Will of the Father.

Jesus did not find things easy. He did not find a ready audience. Crowds came to hear him, but, as he affirms, "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand" (Mt 13:13). Nevertheless, he continued his task, preaching to all in Palestine.

The Twelve Apostles had been for some time with the Master, yet until the end, they did not fully grasp his message. The gospel shows us time and again how patient Jesus was with them. Though he knew their weaknesses and defects, he did not order but simply asked them to follow him. Being almighty, he could have filled them with holiness and virtues in a wink of an eye, effortlessly. Instead, he formed them little by little, step by step. He corrected them. He instructed them. He allowed time to make them suitable for the mission he would give them. Finally, after going up to heaven, he sent them the Holy Spirit to complete his work.

Jesus lived patience and endurance in adversity while his enemies mocked him, scorned him, spat upon him, struck him, buffeted him with open hands, scourged him, crowned him with thorns, and put a bright robe on him as if he were a tinsel king. In fact, a thief, Barabbas, was preferred to Jesus.

Our Lord accepted God's Will, and on the Cross suffered blasphemies and scorn: "If you are the Son of God, come down!" He could have commanded the earth to open up and swallow his tormentors, but he remained silent and accepted the horrible human failure.

Jesus is patient in the Eucharist. He is at the will of the ministers, exposed, enclosed, visited, and forsaken.

Jesus' divine and human natures remain hidden in the Eucharist: In cruce latebat sola deitas ("Only his divine nature was hidden on the Cross"), here even his human nature is unseen.

Jesus allows himself to be subject to our lack of refinement, to outrages, to sacrilege, and to appalling profanations.

God is truly the Almighty, the Creator of all, the Invisible. He himself revealed to men the Truth from heaven and sent the holy and incomprehensible Word. He engraved it in man's heart. Contrary to what one may surmise, God did not accomplish this by sending some subject, messenger, or assistant, some earthly prince or celestial creature. No, he sent the very Architect and Creator of the universe himself, through whom all was made.

Did he send him, one may ask, to act like a tyrant, sowing fear and terror? Not so. In gentleness and compassion he sent him, as a king sending his son. He sent him as King; as God and man. He sent him to men.

God sent his Son to persuade us and save us, not to do violence on us. Violence, you see, is not an attribute of God.

No man has ever seen God or known him, but God has revealed himself to us through faith, by which alone it is possible to see him. God, the Lord and maker of all things, who created the world and set it in order, not only loved man but was also patient with him. So God has always been, is, and will be: kind, good, free from anger, truthful; indeed, he and he alone is good.

When God had made all his plans in consultation with his Son, he waited until a later time, allowing us to follow our own whim. Thus, we were swept along by our unruly passions, led astray by pleasure and desire. Not that he was pleased by our sins: he only tolerated them. Not that he approved of that age of sin: he was planning this era of holiness.

When we had been shown to be undeserving of life, his goodness made us worthy of it. When it became clear to us that we could not enter God's kingdom by our own power, we were enabled to do so by the power of God.

When our sins had reached their highest point, it became clear that punishment was at hand in the shape of suffering and death. The time then came for God to make known his compassion and power. How immeasurable is God's generosity and love!

God did not show hatred for us, reject us, or take vengeance. Instead, he was patient with us, put up with us, and in compassion took our sins upon himself. He gave his own Son as the price of our redemption. The Holy One became the ransom for the wicked, the sinless One for the sinners, the just One for the unjust. The incorruptible One became the price for the corrupt, the immortal One for mortals.

For what else could have buried our sins but his sinlessness? Where else could we—wicked and sinful as we were— have found the means of sanctity except in the Son of God alone?

What a wonderful substitution, what a mysterious plan, what an inconceivable blessing! The wickedness of the many is buried in the Holy One, and the holiness of One sanctifies many sinners. (*Epistle to Diognetus*, 7-9, circa year 124)

Without interruption, let us persevere in our hope and in the guarantee of our salvation—that is, Christ Jesus. “In his mouth, no hint of guilt was discovered; he committed no sin and yet bore our sins in his own Body on the tree” (1 Pet 2:22,24). Rather, he endured everything for our sake so that we might live in him.

Let us then imitate his patience in suffering; if we suffer because of his Name, let us give him that glory. This is the personal example he has given us; this is the object of our faith. (St Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, *Letter to the Philippians*, 8, circa year 130)

There is a picture of the divine patience that exists, so to speak, away from us; the patience which prevails on high. God is patient. But what about that patience which existed openly among men on earth? A kind of patience, as it were, within our reach?

God became incarnate. In his mother’s womb, he awaited the time of birth. After his birth, he gradually grew into manhood. When an adult, he showed no eagerness to become known, but endured reproaches.

He was baptized by his own servant; and by his words alone repelled the attacks of the Tempter. Then he, the only begotten of God, became a master, teaching man how to avoid eternal death; he taught man for his own good how to offer reparation to outraged patience.

He did not wrangle or cry aloud; neither did anyone hear him shouting in the streets; a bruised reed he did not break; a smoking wick he

did not quench (cf. Is 42:2,3). These words of the prophet Isaiah are the testimony of God himself, who placed his own spirit of patience in his Son; and God cannot mislead us or fail. (Tertullian, *De Patientia*, 3)

Jesus did not do violence on one who was unwilling to stay close to him. He scorned no one's table or dwelling; in fact, he attended personally to his disciples by washing their feet. He did not despise sinners or publicans. He showed no anger toward that city which refused to receive him, even when the disciples wished fire from heaven to fall upon such a shameful town (cf. Lk 9:52-56). He healed the ungrateful, and yielded to his persecutors.

More than this, Jesus kept in his company the one who would betray him and did not openly denounce him. Even when he was betrayed, when he was led like a beast to the slaughter for us, "he did not open his mouth, as a sheep before her shearers he was silent" (Is 53:7). If he wished, at a single word, legions of angels from heaven could have come to assist him (Mt 26:53); yet, he did not allow the use of an avenging sword by even one of his disciples (Mt 26:51; Jn 18:10). (Tertullian, *De Patientia*, 3)

Jesus interceded for our sins as if they were his own. When a man commits a heinous crime, his friends and relatives disavow him and desert him to avoid being implicated in the crime. If there is a father or friend willing to help, he always begins by repudiating the evil deed and showing himself free from guilt and not connected with the crime.

But our merciful Lord, lover of our souls, took all the blame for our sins upon himself, and covered his face with shame. He acknowledged and recognized us before the tribunal of God, not only as his friends and relatives, but as his brothers and sons, and even as members of his own Body—the Church—of which he is the Head.

Jesus not only interceded for our forgiveness, but also offered himself to pay the penalty that we deserved, as if he were the malefactor.

Yet the sorrows of our Lord could have been lesser, had they not been increased by our ingratitude and neglect to return his love. (L. de la Palma, *History of the Sacred Passion*, 8)

Amid the calumnies and accusations of false witnesses, our Lord kept silence before the Sanhedrin as if they were not speaking of him. His first

reply had been ill-received; it was manifest that the judges would not listen to the truth. The court was a tribunal only in appearance, in truth a seat of violence and a robbers' den. Jesus sought to benefit all the absent and all to come after him by keeping silence and giving an admirable example of meekness and humility.

He taught us that silence gives perfection and beauty to patience, and that it is great to persevere and suffer in silence in the midst of injuries, hatred, and insults; the more false and full of prejudices the accusation is, the greater the merit gained. (L. de la Palma, *History of the Sacred Passion*, 12)

We must often recall that our Lord has saved us by his suffering and endurance, and that we must work out our salvation by sufferings and afflictions. We must endure with all possible serenity the offenses, denials, and inconveniences we meet.

Contemplate often Christ Jesus, crucified, naked, blasphemed, slandered, forsaken, and overwhelmed by every kind of torment, sorrow, and labor. Remember that your sufferings are not comparable to his, either in quantity or quality. You can never suffer for his sake as much as he did for you.

Think of the sufferings the martyrs endured, and of so many people who are now enduring torments incomparably greater than yours.

Think of our Lord, and of those who without help, assistance, or relief live a continuous trial under the burden of afflictions infinitely greater than yours. Then say, "Are not my hardships like consolations, and my thorns like roses in comparison with their sufferings?" (St Francis of Sales, *Introduction to Devout Life*, 3,3)

We all have an ample share of suffering sufficient to make us saints, if we only suffered courageously and for supernatural motives. Many, however, suffer and complain with bitterness of heart, rebelling against divine providence. Others withstand suffering out of pride or ambition and thus forfeit the fruits of their endurance.

The true motive that should inspire us is submission to the Will of God, and the hope of eternal reward that will crown our patience. But the most potent stimulus should be the thought of *Christ suffering* and *dying* for us. If he, innocence itself, bore heroically so many tortures, physical and

moral, to redeem us and sanctify us, should not we, who are guilty and who by our sins are the cause of his sufferings, consent to suffer with him and with his intentions? Should not we cooperate with him in the work of our purification and sanctification, and partake in his glory by sharing in his sufferings?

Noble and generous souls add to these motives the motive of zeal. They suffer to fulfil what is wanting of the sufferings of Christ and thus work for the redemption of souls. Here lies the secret source of the heroic patience of the saints and of their love for the Cross. (A. Tanqueray, *The Spiritual Life*)

To understand the Sacred Scriptures, we should be guided by the actions of Christ and the behavior of the saints; these should be our criteria.

During his trial before Caiaphas, “one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand saying, ‘Is that how you answer the high priest?’ Jesus answered him, ‘If I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?’” (Jn 18:22-23)

Christ did not, actually, present the other cheek to that man, as he had hinted in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Mt 5:39); nor did St Paul to anyone. Therefore, a mere literal interpretation of the beatitudes falsifies their significance.

The precept of presenting the other cheek to an aggressor refers to a disposition of the soul; when required and fitting, we must bear a second affront, even a greater one, from an aggressor, without falling into sadness. This was the attitude of Christ, giving his body over to the final onslaught. Those words uttered by Jesus are, therefore, a lesson for us. (St Thomas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St John*, 18).

If you seek patience, you will find no better example than the Cross. Great patience occurs in two ways: either when one patiently suffers much, or when one suffers things which one is able to avoid and yet does not avoid.

Christ endured much on the Cross, and did so patiently. “When he suffered he did not threaten; he was like a sheep led to the slaughter and he did not open his mouth.” Therefore Christ’s patience on the Cross was great.

In patience let us run for the prize set before us, looking upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith who, for the joy set before him, bore his Cross and despised the shame. (St Thomas Aquinas, *Collatio 6 Super Credo in Deum*)

The Calm Serenity of Jesus

From a purely human point of view, Jesus' life was a complete failure. Yet his ill-success did not upset the calm serenity of his actions. Opposition to his principles did not rouse him to indignation. The powerlessness to persuade did not cause him to desist from his efforts in despair, or renounce these efforts in petulance. He was not moved, either to overeagerness in manner, or to excess of vehemence in words. Each day, unmoved from his earnestness, or his dignity, or his calm, by the previous day's failure, he resumed his work with the same force, the same courage, the same unimpaired energy of mind and will as before, exactly as if the disappointments of the past were not to be expected in the future.

The heartbreaking wilfulness of men caused him pain, but no indignation. He was not irritated by, though he wondered at, their incredulity. Their persistence in error in the light of Truth so clearly, vividly and persuasively presented to them stirred him neither to bitterness, nor to anger. It caused him neither to be piqued nor to be disheartened, though it weighed like lead on his heart.

Nothing that he had to contend with wrought in him the least change in the perfection of the dispositions—the interior dispositions—with which he faced each new circumstance of his life. Ingratitude and forgetfulness on the part of those whom he healed and comforted produced no diminution of Jesus' tenderness and mercy toward them. With what looked like unconquerable optimism he worked miracle after miracle to prove his Divine mission. And when this powerful reasoning found a barrier in the adamantine prejudices of his countrymen, he recommenced once more with unabated courage.

And we cannot say that his passing triumphs kept alive his hopefulness. He was well aware that these triumphs were superficial and ephemeral, more apparent than real. The Evangelist relates somewhat sadly: "Now many believed in his name, seeing the signs which he did; but Jesus did not trust himself to them, for he knew all men" (Jn 2:24).

Even in the narrow circle of his intimate friends, our Lord failed to excite a sympathetic understanding with himself. That he should have been misunderstood by his enemies would have been tolerable, if only he had not been so misunderstood by his friends.

Each day our Lord took up life's burden in the same calm way; he went straight on through its round of tasks. Jesus was content with doing each function rightly; he never allowed his interior dispositions to be altered or disturbed by the immediate fruitfulness of his labors. It is true that he felt keenly his repeated failures. But he never was tempted by the pain he suffered in his sensitive nature to renounce his enterprise; he never took refuge in inactivity, or in the execution of things which should meet with a better measure of success. (E. Leen, *In the Likeness of Christ*)

At all times our Lord bore himself with the same calm, unchanging, unbroken, undeviating fortitude. He did not waste valuable time in complaints or in self-pity. He wasted no energy in rebellion against circumstances. And he did not passively acquiesce to the inevitable with a gesture of indifference or despair. (E. Leen, *In the Likeness of Christ*)

Even if I know what hell will be, I cannot really imagine what it will be to be hated by Christ, to hear, "I don't know you" (Mt 25:12). Yes; it will be better to suffer a thousand thunderbolts, than to see that face of mildness turning away from me, those eyes of peace not wanting to look upon me.

He came to save me while I was his enemy, hating him, and turning away from him. He even gave himself up to death for me, and I rejected him. After all this, with what kind of eyes shall I ever again look at him?

Notice his gentleness, he does not speak of his gifts. He does not say, "You have despised me who have done so much for you." He does not say, "You have rejected me. And I brought you into being; for your sake I made the earth, heaven, sea and air, and all things that are; I set you over all things on the earth; after been dishonored by you, I did not withdraw myself from you, but thought of you after it all; I chose to become a slave; I was beaten with rods and spat upon; I was slain for you; I died the most shameful death for you; I intercede on high for you; I freely send you my Holy Spirit; I grant you a kingdom; I made you such promises; I am, for your sake, the Head of my Body, the Bridegroom, the Food and Drink, the

Shepherd, and the King; I took you to be my brother, and heir; I brought you out of the darkness into my light.”

He does not mention these things at all, but only the offense—sin.

He does not say, “Depart into the fire prepared for you,” but, “prepared for the devil.” There he shows his love and his patience toward you. (St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St Matthew’s Gospel*, 23)

He Who Loves Jesus Christ Loves Sufferings

Life is a time to gain merits for heaven. To deserve that prize we must imitate Jesus Christ. He suffered for us to encourage us to suffer.

This earth is the place for meriting and, therefore, for suffering. Our true fatherland, where God has prepared for us rest in everlasting joy, is paradise. We have but a short time to stay in this world; yet in this short time we have many labors to undergo; “Man born of a woman, lives for a short time, and filled with many miseries” (Job 14:1). We must suffer, and all must suffer. Be they just or sinners, each one must carry his cross. He who carries it with patience is saved; he who carries it with impatience is lost. (St Anthony M. de’ Liguori, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*)

St Augustine says that the same miseries send some to paradise and some to hell: “One and the same blow lifts the good to glory, and reduces the bad to ashes.”¹ The same saint observes that suffering is the test to distinguish the chaff from the wheat in the Church of God. He who humbles himself under tribulations, and is resigned to the will of God, is wheat for paradise; he who grows haughty, is enraged, and so abandons God, is chaff for hell. (St Anthony M. de’ Liguori, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*)

On the day when the cause of our salvation shall be decided, we will like to enjoy the happy sentence of the predestined. To deserve that prize, our life must be patterned after that of Jesus Christ. “For whom He foreknew He also predestined to be patterned after the image of His Son” (Rom 8:29).

For this purpose the Eternal Word descended upon earth, to teach us, by his example, to carry with patience the cross that God sends us. “Christ suffered for us—wrote St Peter—leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps” (1 Pet 2:21). Thus, Jesus Christ suffered on purpose to

encourage us to suffer. (St Anthony M. de' Liguori, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*)

O God! What a life was that of Jesus Christ! A life of ignominy and pain. The Prophet calls our Redeemer “despised, and rejected by men, a man of sorrows” (Is 53:3). A man held in contempt, and treated as the lowest, the vilest among men, a man of sorrows; yes, for the life of Jesus Christ was made up of hardships and afflictions.

God treats every one that he loves and receives as his son in the same manner as he has treated his beloved Son: “For the Lord trains the ones that he loves and he scourges all those that he acknowledges as his sons” (Heb 12:6).

Thus, Jesus one day said to St Teresa: “Know that the souls dearest to my Father are those who are afflicted with the greatest sufferings.”² Hence the saint said that she would not exchange any of her troubles for all the treasures in the world. She appeared after her death to a soul, and revealed to her that she enjoyed an immense reward in heaven. The reward was not so much due for her good works, as for the sufferings she cheerfully bore in this life for the love of God. The saint added that if she could possibly return to the earth, the only reason would be to suffer more for God. (St Anthony M. de' Liguori, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*)

Some few persons have, at times, the depressing sense of being failures in the spiritual life. On occasions of retreat and recollection, and sometimes, too, in the midst of their occupations, there comes to them an agonizing sense of having drifted away from God. There is a feeling that Jesus and they move in different worlds with no point of contact. They feel very remote from him, from his thoughts and his ways. The consideration of the barrenness of their lives and of the—apparently—wholly un-supernatural condition of their souls fills them with dismay. Their souls present a sorry sight when examined according to the principles of Christian perfection.

These persons have a sense of sinfulness which is more poignant than the actual consciousness of some positive sin. Hateful to themselves, they judge that they must be an object of aversion for the Lord, whose graces they have squandered and whose hopes they have disappointed. Knowing his purity, his holiness, his utter faithfulness to his heavenly Father, they

think that the Lord can no longer care for them. They see themselves so utterly different from Jesus in holiness and rectitude of life.

They are uneasy in his presence because they fear that he, so pure and so good, must shrink from creatures who are vile, mean and unworthy, as they know themselves to be. Seeing no good in their own souls, they are convinced that they can no longer be an object of regard to Jesus. There comes to them at this juncture the subtle temptation to make their drifting away from the Lord a reason for drifting still further from him.

Now, this is totally to misunderstand our divine Lord. It is true that he looks with hatred on sin, and that he cannot love us in so far as we are sinners. But he can and does love us for any little good that remains in us. And, above all, he loves us for what we can possibly become if we respond to the compelling appeals of his grace.

He does not love sin, but he does love those who are sinners. He is patient and never shrinks from contact with us—or from our contact with him—as long as there remains the possibility of our rejecting sin, so displeasing in his sight. (E. Leen, *In the Likeness of Christ*)

Look at Jesus' patience with sinners.

The devil has never got a fully decisive victory over a soul until he has robbed it of full confidence in Jesus, in the inexhaustible goodness of Jesus' Heart toward the wayward, the faithless and the sinful. The cruelest wound we inflict on his Heart, the gravest of our infidelities, occurs when we doubt of his tenderness and mercy.

Those who came in contact with him while he lived on earth never had this attitude of fear towards him, even when they recognized his awe-inspiring holiness. In spite of the consciousness of grave sin that many who approached him must have had, we see no trace in their dealings with him of their having a tendency to shrink from his presence or to dread his approach.

"Now," says St Luke, "the publicans and sinners drew near unto him to hear him" (Lk 15:1). So condescending did he show himself to them on all occasions and such trust had they in him that the charge of having a predilection for sinners and publicans was frequently levelled at him.

His enemies were repelled by the life of austerity led by John of Baptist. Yet they pretended to be scandalized at the absence of rigid penance in the life of Jesus, and at his attitude of clemency towards sinners.

They found fault with the one and with the other so that our Lord was forced to call attention to the contradiction in their minds, saying: "John the Baptist came neither eating bread or drinking wine. And you say: He hath a devil. The Son of Man is come eating and drinking and you say: Behold a man that is a glutton and a drinker of wine, a friend of publicans and sinners" (Lk 7:33-34).

Our Savior showed a habitual readiness to forgive sins, and exhibited such patience, tenderness, sympathy and kindness towards sinners, that it caused comment and criticism among the "rigidly righteous." The allusions to this subject are frequent in the Gospels.

So constant did the murmurs of his enemies become, that one day our Lord turned on them in a series of parables on God's mercy. There are three parables following one after the other. Jesus laid bare to an astonished world what passes through the human heart of God, his patience and love toward those who have left him to seek happiness in sin. The parables of the strayed sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son are a wonderful revelation of the tenderness of Jesus.

Those hard-hearted Jewish priests, the representatives of God on earth and the ministers of his covenant with men, wanted Jesus to show himself austere and forbidding toward those who have failed. Stung to the quick, our Lord was driven to disclose the incomprehensible yearning of his great Heart even toward the most unworthy of us. He is forced, as it were, to reveal to the vulgar and the uncomprehending, to the conventional and the narrow-hearted what looks like weakness: his love and patience toward sinners. He does not excuse his actions, he does not even pause to justify them. He simply lays bare the inner workings of his Heart—what the saints have had the hardihood to call *the folly of his love*—for us, miserable failures in the way of holiness. (E. Leen, *In the Likeness of Christ*)

Chapter XV in the Gospel according to St Luke is remarkable and repays study. It will be noticed that Jesus is not content with one parable, but figure is added to figure, image to image, detail heaped on detail, in order to give as complete a picture as possible of the boundless mercy and patience of the God-Man. It would look as if all barriers of reserve were broken down, and Jesus allowed men to penetrate into the most mysterious recesses of his Heart. The words follow rapidly, one after another; the sentences are vivid and eloquent; each parable succeeds the preceding one

without a break, almost with an appearance of breathlessness. And in all is observed the same rapid movement, the same nervous phrasing, the same vivid coloring.

Jesus' defence of himself is beautiful in the extreme, beautiful in its simplicity, beautiful in that eloquence which touches the innermost fibers of our hearts.

The story of the Lost Sheep is sufficient in itself to bring consolation to the repentant sinners for all time, and to inspire the most obdurate with unbounded confidence in the Divine Mercy. But Jesus was not satisfied with it. He supplements this moving story by two others widely different, but equally moving and, perhaps, more consoling.

God's mercy casts a wide net. As he was developing the first parable, our Lord saw all the possible phases of human waywardness. He feared that—in the future—some sorrowing man might find in the particularly heinous circumstances of his sin a reason for doubting of the mercy of God. Thus, he tried to forestall all possible objections by showing forth that no depths of wickedness, misery, and failure are too deep to be measured by the plummet of his Love.

In the portraits of the Good Shepherd seeking the stray sheep, the anxious householder looking for the lost coin, and the loving father awaiting the return of the prodigal son, Jesus shows that the mercy of God is multifaceted. Though simple in its essence, it is many-sided and adaptable; able to meet every emergency occasioned by wickedness. To every form of sin it can oppose a new front. Wickedness will rather exhaust the possibilities of crime than the infinite resources of the Divine Goodness. God's patience forgives all our trespasses. Our Lord has taken away from us every possible reason for not approaching him with confidence.

And as our Lord was in those days so he is now. He does not change with the passing years. Our treatment of him cannot change him. He is here with us in our churches. He is the same in Heart and in Mind as he was in those days when he pronounced the parables of the Prodigal Son and the Good Shepherd.

As he never then showed coldness, aloofness or displeasure towards those who approached him, no matter how stained their souls were with sin, he does not do so now. Our *badness* cannot modify his goodness, nor can it rob him of his interest in us. He looks out on us from the Tabernacle with the same yearning love, the same expectancy, the same hopefulness which

no rebuff on our part can chill, as he exhibited to all those whom he encountered while on earth.

He is concerned about us as he was about those whom he compassionately fed in the desert. We are just as valuable in his eyes as they were. He will be at least as tender, as condescending, as kind towards us as he was towards them. They were probably no better than we are. No matter how frequently we may have failed in his service, there is no reason why he should not have an absolute, childlike confidence in Jesus.

The great little saint of Lisieux revealed the spiritual validity of this attitude. She writes: "If I draw near to God with love and trust, it is not because I have kept from mortal sin. Were my conscience laden with every imaginable crime, I should not have one whit less confidence. Heart-broken and repentant, I would throw myself into my Savior's arms. He loves the prodigal son: I know his words to Magdalene, to the adulterous woman, to that of Samaria. Who would make me afraid if I know his mercy and his love? I know that all my numberless sins would disappear in an instant, like a drop of water cast into a furnace."

Having this patience toward sinners is our Lord's own choice. When accused of going with those who were not remarkable for the rectitude of their lives, his answer was that "he was come not to call the just but the sinners." Our sins, then, far from creating a barrier between us and him, really constitute a reason, a title or right, to come to him. They also constitute a reason for his coming to us. He could have said to the Pharisees: "I frequent sinners because they need me more than others. The physician spends his time with and gives all his attention and care to those that are ill, not to those that are in health. I am the Physician of souls. That is my work." And "They that are in health need not a physician but they that are ill" (Mt 9:12).

Encouraging as is this simile for us, it does not fully exemplify the relations of Jesus to our souls. The doctor gives merely his services to his patients, places his skill at their disposal. Our Lord not only gives us his services, he lavishes on us his love as well.

That the Lord loves us is true, and it is incomprehensible. Why he is so devoted to us is not possible to fully explain, but one reason for it may be inferred: We have cost him so dear. For us, sinners, he poured forth his Precious Blood. "Knowing," says St Peter, "that you were not redeemed with corruptible things as gold or silver, but with the Precious Blood of

Christ, as of a lamb unspotted and undefiled” (1 Pet 1:18-19). And again we read in St Paul: “For you are bought with a great price” (1 Cor 6:20).

The child is loved by his mother by the very pain he has cost her. Jesus values us because he has given his all for us—every drop of his Heart’s Blood. Is it not an astonishing mystery that he values us so highly, and we, alas, so often, so little value him?

Each of the parables insinuates that what was lost was precious in the eyes of the person who suffered the loss. To the shepherd, the animal that he had seen grow up amidst his flock had become dear. He had watched it as a lamb, and he had cared for and pastured it with solicitude. It had become an integral part of his possessions, and he had looked to it to bring him an increase of wealth in the shearing seasons. Anyone who is acquainted with the life of the country knows how attached those who tend domestic animals become to the objects of their charge. Hence it was that the shepherd felt that something had gone out of his life, when he observed that one sheep had strayed from the fold.

In the second parable, the thrifty housekeeper had amassed, by diligent toil, a modest fortune. Ten coins constituted her hard-won savings—of considerable value to her as the fruits of a life of industry. Her distress was great when she missed one coin from her little hoard—it represented a tenth of her fortune. Our Lord describes in sympathetic and tender detail the anxious search she instituted for the missing coin and her great satisfaction at its recovery.

A kind of climax is reached in the third parable. In this, it is no longer an animal of the flock, or a relatively large portion of worldly possessions, but a dearly beloved son who by his desertion wrings with anguish the heart of a loving father. There is infinite pathos in the description of the sense of loss and abandonment felt by the bereaved parent. The deprivation of land and goods and household treasures counted as nothing with him when weighed in the balance against the loss of his youngest and his dearest son. All those details are purposely accumulated by our divine Lord. He waited to bring home to us that consoling truth, which we find so difficult to accept—that we mean very much to him, that we are very precious in his sight, and that he is ready to go to any length to keep us close to himself. (E. Leen, *In the Likeness of Christ*)

Footnotes:

¹Serm. 52.

²*Life*, addit.

The Patience of the Mother of God

Beside Jesus, his Mother, Mary stands at the foot of the Cross. As predicted by Simeon, she had to endure the sword piercing her heart. She is there fully aware of what is happening, accepting calmly the will of God. After Jesus, she is our model of patience.

Mary, who at the Annunciation called herself the “handmaid of the Lord,” remained throughout her earthly life faithful to what this name expresses. In this she confirmed that she was a true *disciple* of Christ; our Lord strongly emphasized that his mission was one of service: the Son of man “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28). Thus, Mary became the first of those who “serving Christ also in others with humility and patience lead their brothers and sisters to that King whom to serve is to reign,”¹ and she fully obtained that “state of royal freedom” proper to Christ’s disciples: to serve means to reign! (John Paul II, Enc. *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 41)

“When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took the Child to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.” (Lk 2:22-35)

The presentiment of the Cross and the allusion to the sword which would pierce her heart did not embitter the life of our Lady. It is impossible to think of the Virgin Mary as a bitter person. Bitterness, in the common sense of the word, is related to discontentment; a bitter person is one who is not satisfied with his lot, who looks on life through the clouded glass of his unfortunate experience.

A person who surrenders himself unconditionally to God, like our Lady, may indeed experience bitterness, a noble bitterness, but one which

does not in any way change his way of life, his personality, his attitude to things. (F. Suárez, *Mary of Nazareth*)

The flight into Egypt must have engraved itself vividly in Mary's mind. However much she tried she could hardly forget an event that changed her whole life as much as that precipitous flight into a strange, distant land, especially when she had to stay there for an unspecified time.

If our Lady had viewed life from a purely natural point of view, she would have had more than sufficient reasons to be upset. For if God was almighty, why wouldn't he spare his Son that danger? Why would he burden them with the anguish of the flight into Egypt and the misery of living in a strange country? Why would he disrupt the peaceful course of their lives with such a journey? It would have been easy for God to make Herod die a little sooner, or else change his evil designs. But instead, he permitted the violent deaths of innocent children who had nothing to do with Herod or Jesus, and all the resulting sorrow to their mothers.

Mary, however, pondered these things in her heart. She did not understand them, at least some of them, but she knew that God was behind everything and that what she did not understand had its explanation in God. She did not ask for miracles, but respected the mysterious wishes of the Creator, she knew the power of human liberty, she knew that sin existed. Her Son was concerned precisely with these things. He had come to repair the damage that man had done by sin and the misuse of his freedom. God knew what value these things, which from the human viewpoint were real catastrophes, had in relation to eternal life. (F. Suárez, *Mary of Nazareth*)

As St Matthew remarks, another prophecy had been fulfilled: "Out of Egypt have I called my son" (Mt 2:15). God uses man's actions, always respecting his free will, to fulfil His designs. In this case, God used Herod's evil plan to fulfil the prophecy; just as He had used the emperor's census as a starting point for a series of events which ended in the fulfillment of another prophecy—and Jesus was born in Bethlehem when everything pointed logically to his being born in Nazareth.

This is the wonderful thing about God's action in the world: without forcing anyone or anything, he makes of everything an instrument of his glory for the good of those who love him. It is of no importance that sometimes—or many times—that particular good is not the good we would

have liked. It is enough for us to know that God makes no mistakes and that he always wins, so that nothing, no event, no person can make us lose our serenity and peace. God can right everything that seems wrong and save everything that seems lost. Even though, as long as we are limited by our own smallness, our observation is restricted to what we see—which is not much—and the world frequently appears to be woven of events whose meaning we do not perceive.

“Here,” Chesterton reminds us through one of his most famous characters, Father Brown, “we live on the wrong side of the tapestry ...; the things that happen here have no meaning whatsoever; but later on, elsewhere, everything becomes meaningful.” True enough, now we can see only the wrong side of the tapestry, only what is human and all the imperfections that it entails, one has to go round to “the other side” to see things in their entirety: our contribution, and God’s contribution to the action. God uses our human actions, corrects them, and makes them whole by grace. (F. Suárez, *Mary of Nazareth*)

During those three hours on Calvary, Mary was weighed down under a trial so terrible that we will never fully understand it and never be able to describe it. She saw them stripping Jesus of his clothes; she saw him abused, humiliated. She saw him deserted by those who had once acclaimed him, by those for whom he had worked miracles, by his disciples who were now ashamed of him. She saw the chief priests of her people, the highest authorities of the Temple, insulting him, challenging him to come down from the Cross as a proof of his divinity.

She saw how Jesus kept silent, how he did not defend himself from accusations levied against him, how he did not give them the proof they demanded. It was as if his power had vanished the moment he fell into the hands of his enemies; as if they were right all along. She knew that her Son was innocent, that he was the Son of God, that he had done only good to others and never hurt anyone. And God did not raise a finger to defend his Son, as if he did not care. (F. Suárez, *Mary of Nazareth*)

The trial reached its crisis with that cry from Jesus, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk 15:34). It is the moment of greatest desolation, the hour of greatest darkness. It is the breakdown of everything

human in him, as if Jesus had lost all the courage he got from knowing he was sustained by his Father.

Earlier, Mary had heard Jesus asking the Father to forgive those who were crucifying him because they knew not what they were doing. She had heard him promise Paradise to one of the thieves beside him. Between Father and Son there was, then, a perfect communication.

And now, suddenly, the horrible thing happened. It seemed as if Jesus now found nothing, a blank, where before he had found the Father. Before it was: “This is my beloved Son...;” and now: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”... Could this be Mary’s hideous temptation, the temptation of abandoning the Father for the Son?

But again, our Lady rose to the heights that God expected of her. She loved her Son as no other mother is capable of loving. But she did not love Jesus at the expense of, or above, the will of the Father. On the contrary, she loved and accepted the will of the Father even at the cost of her Son and above him, if we may use these expressions. And this does not mean that she had no feelings, or was hard-hearted, or insensitive. Rather, she had to have a big, courageous heart to bear all this pain without shirking. (F. Suárez, *Mary of Nazareth*)

Our Lady did not merely stand and watch the drama taking place, helpless to prevent or change it. Her participation was active; she was no mere spectator. She consented to it all. She did not intercede for her Son; she did not beg for mercy, or appeal to any friend; she made no effort to change the course of events or in any way interfere with the Will of the Father. She accepted it with respect and left to Him all initiative, as at the Annunciation, as always. (F. Suárez, *Mary of Nazareth*)

After Jesus’ burial, the disciples were dejected and confused. They were discouraged and depressed, as if all their hopes and dreams had died with Jesus. They were so downcast that some—those who went to Emmaus—deserted. They thought back on those three years of following Jesus. What a magnificent adventure it had been. They had surrendered themselves completely, leaving home and family and profession, trusting completely in Jesus’ word. And now after all that, they found themselves abandoned and disillusioned, with the additional risk of being persecuted for having been foolish enough to follow Jesus.

During those hours after Christ's death, Mary's faith and patience was the only bridge in this world abandoned by Jesus which joined the Passion with the Resurrection. The disciples gathered about her and she began to be their mother, teaching them to wait patiently and serenely, trusting in the promise. (F. Suárez, *Mary of Nazareth*)

Footnotes:

¹Second Vatican Council, Dogm. Const. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 36.

Abandonment in God's Will

Doing God's Will

We must inevitably suffer trials and sufferings in this life that require the assistance of the virtue of patience to keep us strong and firm lest we yield to discouragement and sorrow. Many souls lose the merit of their trials and sufferings because they fail to exercise the virtue of patience. They suffer even more than they would have because of their lack of conformity to the will of God.

Patience is not only a moral virtue; it is also a Christian–supernatural–virtue. As such, it proceeds from God (cf. Ps 61:6), and is intimately related to the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity.

A person who has to undertake a prolonged, intense effort needs special help from God, or else he will end up tired. He needs to exercise the virtue of *faith*, because he knows that God will grant that help; *hope*, with the absolute confidence that God wants what he is doing; and *charity*, which makes him persevere in his petition, identified with God's will.

The Lord spoke of the last days (Lk 21:12-19). He also predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, which came to pass some forty years later. His Second Coming will be “in power and great glory.” Until then, all must suffer. Jesus warned his disciples of the impending persecution and exhorted his followers to persevere, no matter what should happen. “By your patience you will gain your lives”—*In patientia vestra possidebitis animas vestras*.

In the years that followed, the Apostles meditated on the Lord's warning: “A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (Jn 15:20).

Even the worst tribulation has a role to play in God's providence. God permits trials because they can be the cause of greater goods. For example, the early Roman persecutions strengthened the primitive Church and deepened her supernatural spirit. This was to fulfil the Lord's prediction: “In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33).

You feel happier. But this time it is a giddy sort of happiness, a bit impatient. With it comes the clear feeling that something is being wrested from you as a sacrifice.

Listen to me carefully; here on earth there is no perfect happiness. That is why, now, immediately, without complaining or feeling a victim, you should offer yourself as an oblation to God, with total and absolute self-surrender. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 71)

“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls¹ are ever before me” (Is 49:15-16).

It is as if the prophet had said: “I carry you in my hands and I keep you ever before my eyes to shelter and defend you.”

The same prophet said, “I bear you within my womb” (Is 46:3). As a woman carries her baby within her womb, which serves for the baby’s house, litter, wall, support, and all things, thus God keeps us.

A Christian lives in such confidence and feels himself so well provided for in all things that he is never troubled or disturbed by whatever happens.

You told me: “Father, I am having a very rough time.”

In answer I whispered in your ear: “Take upon your shoulders a small part of that cross, just a tiny part. And if you can’t manage that then ... leave it entirely on the strong shoulders of Christ. And from this moment on, repeat with me:

My Lord and my God: Into your hands I abandon the past, and the present, and the future, what is small and what is great, what amounts to a little and what amounts to a lot, things temporal and things eternal.

Then, don’t worry any more. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way of the Cross*, 7th, 3)

Patience Calls for Supernatural Outlook

Supernatural outlook is the source of our patience; and our patience results in serenity, inner peace, and joy.

The conviction that God knows what he is doing and that he does it for our good makes us impervious to the disappointments and distress of

those who look at things with a purely human outlook. Even more, this conviction makes us feel joy and gladness on all occasions. The more confident this conviction is, the more abundant the joy.

Natural—purely human—outlook makes us consider things limited to the natural sphere, without any consideration of the world of grace, without any consideration of anything higher than what we see. Supernatural outlook, on the contrary, relates everything to God's plans, and puts into practice the knowledge of God's will which wishes, permits, or disposes everything that happens in the universe.

If man is always aware of the will of God not as something dead or indifferent to the things that happen, but as an active force in the world, then he can look beyond himself and not despair or become depressed when seeming catastrophes strike him.

“Perhaps the best way to picture the whole process is to visualize God, not merely creating the beginning of the world, and leaving it, so to speak, to work out its own destiny, but rather choosing this particular world with its complete history right down to the very end, after examining every single action of every single creature in full detail and in all its consequences, comparing this possible history and sequence with all other possible ones, and finally deciding to create *this* particular scheme of things in which *this* particular event and all its consequences occur.”² (F. Suárez, *Mary of Nazareth*)

An example will help to clarify the difference between natural and supernatural outlook. Let us imagine for a moment that during a game of chess suddenly each piece acquires a degree of intelligence proportionate to its importance and the way in which the rules allow it to move: the queen first, then the rooks and the bishops, all the way down to the pawns.

One of the players moves a pawn one space forward which leaves the king unprotected, prevents the queen from moving, and leaves the pawn itself unprotected. This pawn, with its tiny intelligence and short sight, which barely sees beyond its own square, would think that such a move was ridiculous; if it were capable of feeling it would be upset, irritated, impatient, and unhappy.

The poor pawn does not realize that the player sees not only him but all the other pieces, his own and his opponent's, and, besides, is thinking of

several moves ahead. With its narrow and limited intelligence, the pawn does not know that this move which he considers disastrous is indispensable for a checkmate that will come ten moves later.

We are like the pawns in an exciting game of chess, whose chess board is the universe and whose pieces are innumerable. God is the player, the One who foresees the movements of all the pieces; and he always wins, although to our poor pawn's intelligence it may seem that he slips up and makes disastrous moves. (F. Suárez, *Mary of Nazareth*)

We have a human outlook when we forget that we are pawns, when we forget that behind all those things which annoy and irritate us, which make us impatient, upset, depressed, which discourage us or fill us with a disorderly optimism, there is *something* which gives them a definite purpose. Just as a purely human outlook results in our becoming irritated and disgusted with the way life treats us, supernatural outlook leads to serenity and hope, for “we know that to them that love God all things work together for good” (Rom 8:28).

This supernatural vision provides us with shelter from disturbing anxieties; it keeps us well balanced and objective as between exaltation and dejection, armed with an interior calm that remains unruffled even in the presence of our own or our neighbor's miseries. As Blessed Josemaría Escrivá has put it: “We must not forget that for a child of God over and above the raging storm there is a sun that shines brightly, and beneath the pounding and devastating waves there is a prevailing stillness and calm.”

Now then, we need faith in order to see beyond the superficial appearances of things, faith in God and in the word of God. Supernatural outlook is simply living our faith every day in the most insignificant details of our existence. (F. Suárez, *Mary of Nazareth*)

The most subtle danger to the soul that this world presents is not so much in the clear-cut mortal sin of completely and consciously turning away from God; but it is the surreptitious infiltration of a false humanism whose content and limits take no account of any supernatural reality. The persons imbued with this false humanism seek the enjoyment of earthly goods—however moderately—as if they were goals achieved, treating them, consciously or unconsciously, as ends in themselves.

There is no Christianity without the Cross. Mortification, either willingly accepted when God sends it or undertaken voluntarily, is the normal proof that our belief in Christ is something alive and real and not merely theoretical knowledge. As we are taught in our Catechism, the mark of a Christian is the sign of the Cross, and this expression is not to be limited to the mere external sign.

This does not mean, however, that a Christian should lead a life of bitterness. On the contrary, if there is anything in the world that gives man a genuine joy of living, it is the gospel of Christ, the fact of being Christian. (F. Suárez, *Mary of Nazareth*)

“Near the cross of Jesus stood [*stabat*] his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene” (Jn 19:25)

The *stabat* of this Mother, while she tasted drop by drop the chalice of a never-equalled sorrow, would have been an ideal subject for an ancient Greek tragedy. Sorrow would have been immortalized in the mother, standing beside her dying Son bleeding in agony on the Cross, dark clouds gathering around her, with no hope of consolation, and humiliated by the sarcasm and contempt of her enemies celebrating their triumph.

But no Greek tragedy was written, there was no declamation, no chorus; nothing but the dry, brief words of a few men who gave testimony of what happened. Before Christ there was tragedy because Destiny ruled. After Christ tragedy is impossible because He has revealed to us the Will of the Father.

Tragedy is possible only where faith in a paternal God is supplanted by the sense of an implacable fatalism that man is abandoned to the caprices of a cruel fate, indifferent to human sufferings. All the hardness and cruelty usually associated with the word “Destiny” come precisely from its dissociation from faith in God, because destiny is the pagan term for God’s plan and is the consequence of man’s rebellion against the divine will. (F. Suárez, *Mary of Nazareth*)

One cannot speak of the *tragedy* of Calvary because there can be no tragedy in relation to Jesus and Mary. The fulfillment of God’s will can never be “tragic.” Tragedy supposes a blind and cruel fate that preys on man and oppresses him; a fate that never understands him and is indifferent to his suffering. A Christian, therefore, can never feel that he is a victim of

fate, provided that he is genuinely Christian; that is, for him there is no such thing as Destiny. If he is united to Christ and participates in his life, then he is not the object of blind Destiny, but of intelligent Destiny. There can be no blind fate, but God's loving and paternal care.

On the other hand, when man cuts himself off from Christ, when he rejects the light, then he remains blind and gropes in darkness. He understands nothing; he finds himself whirled about by unknown forces in the face of which he does not know what to do; he is left a prisoner of his own helplessness. Then, indeed, he creates his own tragedy. Since Christ, a tragic fate is possible only for those who choose it by rebelling against God. (F. Suárez, *Mary of Nazareth*)

There is a remedy for your anxieties: Have patience, rectitude of intention, and look at things with a supernatural perspective. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 853)

Our existence on earth, with its enterprises and its toils, is given us by God to be used for the transforming of our souls, and not for the flattering of our inordinate desires of excellence.

A Christian knows that things are all wrong not when he cannot have *his own way* with them, but when God cannot have *His way* with him. We are not meant to mold persons and events to our will, but rather to be molded by God and to mold the world according to the form preordained for it by God.

Life's purpose is to purify us, not to gratify us.

Existence is not a toy that we can use or abuse at our caprice, but a mill of God, in which everything in our souls that proves an obstacle to the supernatural life is ground into dust.

Serenity: Fruit of Abandonment in God's Will

*"Stages: to be resigned to God's will, to conform to God's will, to want God's will, to **love** God's will."*³ *This is a program for sanctity.*

*We should not think that accepting God's will is something bad but unavoidable. No. God is our loving Father who only wants the best for us, what is most appropriate for us, what will really make us happy. Thus, we should **love** God's will.*

St. Josemaría Escrivá tells us: “Be happy when you are mistreated and dishonored. Many people shout against you. It has become fashionable to spit upon you. You are like garbage—*omnium peripsema* (cf. 1 Cor 4:13).

“It is hard, very hard. It is difficult, until a man finally goes to the tabernacle and sees himself considered as the world’s filth, like a poor worm, and truly says, ‘Lord, if you do not need my honor, why shall I want it?’ Until then, a son of God does not know what it is to be happy. Not until he achieves that nakedness and self-surrender that springs from love and is based on mortification and on suffering.”

The source of all true joy is our unconditional identification with what the Lord wants for us.

Among the things that Christ our Redeemer taught us, one of the most important was that we should have an entire conformity with the will of God in all things. He taught us that in words and in deeds. Instructing us how to pray, he set down one of the principal petitions: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10). He confirmed this teaching with his example: “I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me: (Jn 6:38).

When he was about to accomplish the work of our Redemption, that Holy Thursday, Jesus prayed in Gethsemani; his human will, body, and sensible faculties shrank from the prospect of the impending death. He said, “Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me” (Mt 26:42). Yet his human will was always ready to accept whatever his Father would send him. Thus, he added, “Yet not my will, but thine be done.”

To go to the root of the matter, we must take into account two brief but substantial principles. The first is that *we will advance in sanctity in so far we accept wholeheartedly God’s will*. The greater this conformity, the greater our holiness will be.

We must accept what God accepts, and reject what he rejects. As a pagan philosopher said, “To have the same *I will* and *I will not* with the person you love; that is true friendship.”⁴ Thus, the more identified with and united to the will of God a man is, the better he will be.

There is nothing better or more perfect than the will of God. Thus, the more a man seeks to conform himself to the will of God, the better and more perfect he will be. If God is the most perfect being, the more perfect

any other being will be, the more it is assimilated and made like God. (A. Rodríguez, *Practice of Perfection and Christian Virtues*)

The second fundamental principle is that—excluding sin—*nothing can happen or come about in this world but by the will and command of God*. We exclude sins because God cannot be the cause or author of these; as it is impossible for fire to freeze, or for the sun to darken, so it is infinitely more against the goodness of God to love evil.

God governs the world through secondary causes, yet nothing is done but by the will of God who governs the universe. Nothing comes by chance in respect to God; all is foreseen, registered, and sorted out by his hands. He knows you completely; he counts all the hairs of your head; not one shall fall but by his will.

From men's point of view, some things happen by chance because they neither intended nor thought of them. But from God's point of view, things do not happen by chance, but by his knowledge and will, because he had ordained them so, for secret and hidden ends known only to himself.

And this is the conclusion we should draw from these two principles: Since all that happens, happens with God's consent; since all our perfection consists in conforming ourselves to his will, we should take all things as coming from God's hands, accepting and loving his most holy will.

We must not take anything as coming by chance or by the machinations and contrivance of men, for that is what usually gives us so much pain and annoyance. We must not think that this or that came on you because so-and-so managed it, and if it had not been for this or that, things would have gone much better. Whatsoever way or roundabout process they come, it always God who sends them; he uses them to accomplish his plan of salvation. One father of the desert used to say that a man could not find true repose in this life until he reckons that there is only God and himself in the world.

Taking all things as coming from God, however small they are and in whatever manner they come, a man keeps himself in peace and quiet and lives a heavenly life on earth. (A. Rodríguez, *Practice of Perfection and Christian Virtues*)

Afflictions and penal evils come from the hand of God. It would not be necessary to insist on this truth, were it not for the obscurity that the

devil cunningly tries to throw on it.

From the above stated truth that “God is not the cause or author of sin,” the devil draws a false conclusion. He admits that evils that come our way by natural causes or irrational creatures, like sickness, hunger, and barrenness, come from the hand of God. There is no sin in these elements. But—the devil makes us believe—the evil and affliction that comes about by the fault of a man who wounds me, robs me, or insults me does not come from the hand of God nor is guided by his providence; it comes solely from the malice of another man.

This is a very great error.

St Dorotheus says, “There are some who, when another person says a word against them or harm them, forget about God and turn all their rage against their closest neighbor. They are like dogs that bite the stone thrown at them, not looking at or taking into account the hand that threw it. (A. Rodríguez, *Practice of Perfection and Christian Virtues*)

“Blessed are the peace makers, for they shall be called children of God” (Mt 5:9).

St Augustine comments on this passage saying that our Redeemer calls the peace makers “blessed” and “children of God” because there is nothing in them that resists the will of God. The sowers of peace conform in all things to God’s will like good sons, who seek to be in everything like their Father, identifying their will with their Father’s will.

God deals with us as a natural father would do. When a father has to correct a son, he takes a stick—even though he finds it hard to do—and corrects his son with it. Then he casts the stick into the fire, and keeps his love and gifts for the son. In the same manner God uses wicked men as an instrument and scourge to correct the good.

It is said that when the barbarian Alaric was going to sack and destroy Rome, a venerable monk begged him not to be the cause of so many calamities which, in fact, happened. Alaric replied, “I am not going to Rome by my own determination, but some person torments me from within every day, saying, ‘Go to Rome and destroy the city.’” The Lord took him as the instrument of his punishment; we must recognize men as instruments of divine justice and providence. (A. Rodríguez, *Practice of Perfection and Christian Virtues*)

The root and principle of our peace is to accept God's will. In this way a man places himself in the hands of God, like clay in the potter's hands. Thus, a man no longer labors for himself, but does everything for God. He desires nothing but to fulfil God's will, both in prosperity and consolation as in adversity and affliction.

There is a very dangerous kind of impatience: that of a man who wants to choose what he has to suffer. He says that such and such things are not proper for his salvation, and that he cannot bear what God is sending him.

Everybody should persuade himself and trust that what God sends him is what fits him; hence, he will take it with patience, conforming his will with God's will.

You are not to choose the hardships or temptations that you are to undergo, but take as from the hand of God what he sends you; that is what befits you.

When patience is abandoned, all the good already done is ruined. With patience, unity is preserved. (St Gregory the Great, *Book of Pastoral Care*, III, 9)

Oh, patience, how I wish to glorify you for being queen of all things we do!... You begin being our daily crown, and you end the mother of martyrs. You are the rampart of our faith, the fruit of our hope, the friend of our charity... Happy, eternally happy, is he who carries you as companion. (St Zeno, *Works*, PL 11,317)

Footnotes:

1Referring to Zion's walls.

2Boylan, *This Tremendous Lover*, 2, 16.

3St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 774

4*Eadem velle et eadem nolle, ea demum firma amicitia est.*

Patience and Long-Suffering

Long-Suffering: Patiently Waiting

The virtue of patience is related to perseverance, steadfastness, and long-suffering. It is a virtue proper to man, a being who has not reached his final status. To reach that status of perfect happiness, man has to tread his way amid obstacles all along his life. Often obstacles that looked like initial difficulties not only persist but even increase.

Habitually the struggle is on trivial, routine details: a defect of our character, a tedious task, or an unpleasant companion. These are situations we would like to eradicate at once, like the servant of the parable of the grain and the cockle. But that expeditious tactic is not always possible or convenient; often God wants us to persevere in the struggle to gain merit.

We will often have trials lasting for a long time without interruption, as happens to a person forced to live with someone with a difficult character. We need then *longanimity*, or *long-suffering*. This is a special virtue resembling patience. It is called so because of the length of the trial, the duration of the suffering, the insults, all that must be borne for months or years.

This kind of patience helps us to wait; to wait for God, for the others, and for ourselves. To wait for what? For the good we expect from them; thus, we reject the impatience caused by the delay. To practice longanimity is to patiently suffer a long delay.

It is more meritorious and difficult to endure for a long time what irritates us than to attack the enemy in a moment of enthusiasm; aggression is a sudden movement, endurance a protracted action. It is more difficult for a soldier to hold out for a long time under a shower of bullets in a cold, damp trench than to take part in an attack with all the ardor of his temperament.¹

There is always a most difficult test for our fidelity: a patient perseverance.... It is easy to be consistent with our faith for one or several days; it is difficult but important to be consistent for our entire life. It is easy to be consistent with our faith when life runs smooth; it is difficult to be consistent at the hour of tribulation. We can speak of fidelity only when

we are consistent for our entire life. (John Paul II, *Homily in Mexico*, Jan. 27, 1979)

From time to time I have wondered which kind of martyrdom is the greater: that of the person who receives death for the faith, at the hand of God's enemies; or the martyrdom of someone who spends his years working with no other purpose than that of serving the Church and souls, and who grows old smiling, all the while passing unnoticed....

For me, the unspectacular martyrdom is more heroic.... That is your way. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way of the Cross*, 7th, 4)

The true Christian is always ready to answer the summons of God. Someone who is struggling to live as a man of Christ is at any moment ready to fulfil his duty. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 875)

Think of a soldier dying for his country or a martyr dying for his faith; the virtue of fortitude makes them endure the fatal blows. Yet, it may be more heroic for any of us to endure unflinchingly the trials of life; and this is the role of the virtue of patience.

Constancy in the Struggle and in the Desire to Improve

The Gospel tells us about a man—a paralytic—who has been ill for thirty-eight years, and who is hoping for a miraculous cure from the waters of the pool at Bethsaida. “When Jesus saw him and knew that he had been lying there a long time he said to him, ‘Do you want to be healed?’” “The sick man replied in all simplicity: ‘Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is troubled, and while I am going another steps down before me.’” Jesus said to him, “Rise, take up your pallet and walk.” The paralytic obeyed. “And at once the man was healed, and he took up his pallet and walked” (Jn 5:1-16).

The Lord is always willing to listen to us and to give us whatever we need in any situation. His goodness is always in excess of our calculations. But it requires a corresponding response on our part, with a desire to get out of the situation we are in. There can be no pact with our defects and errors, and we must make the effort to overcome them. We cannot ever “get used to” the shortcomings and weaknesses that separate us from God and from others. We cannot shield ourselves under the excuse that they are part of our

character, or that we have already tried several times over to tackle them without positive result.

This is the crux of the matter that moves us to improve in our interior dispositions. We should, then, foster that conversion of the heart to God and those works of penance. Thus, we will be preparing our souls to receive the graces God wishes to grant us. (F. Fernández Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 1, 11)

Jesus asks us to persevere in the struggle, and to begin again as often as necessary, realizing love grows in the struggle. “The Lord does not ask the paralytic in order to learn—this would be superfluous—but to make his patience known to all, for that invalid for thirty-eight years had hoped, without ceasing, to be freed from his illness.”²

Our love for Christ is shown in our decisiveness and the effort we make to root out our dominant defect as soon as possible, or to obtain a virtue that seems to us difficult to practice. But it is also shown *in the patience* that we exercise in the ascetical struggle. It is possible that the Lord will ask us to struggle over a long period, perhaps *for thirty-eight years*, to grow in a particular virtue, or to overcome that particular negative aspect of our interior life.

A well-known spiritual author has taught the importance of being patient with one’s own defects so as to develop *the art of profiting from one’s faults*.³ We ought not to be surprised or disconcerted when, after having used all the means reasonably within our reach, we have not managed to reach the goal we have set for ourselves. We must not simply *get used to it*, but *use our faults* to grow in true humility, experience, and maturity of judgement.

The man in the Gospel was constant over thirty-eight years, and we may suppose that he could have so continued to the end of his days. The reward for his constancy was, above all, the meeting with Jesus. (F. FernándezCarvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 1, 11)

The Church’s Patience

How she has waited, the Church of Christ, all down the centuries, and with how little regard to the maxims of human prudence and human skill! Not seizing her opportunity here and there, where circumstances seemed

favorable; not trimming her sails to every passing breeze, but patiently issuing her invitation, and leaving grace to do its work.

How many hopes the Church has seen fail, over how many apostasies has she wept; how she has seen the fashions of the world change about her, old creeds die down, and new creeds replace them; the folly of yesterday turned into the wisdom of today! Should she not by now have become hardened and cynical? Her pity for mankind turned into a weary scorn, her ambitious hopes into the dogged persistency of despair? We might have expected it, but we were wrong.

What if, here and there, she has toiled long and caught little for her Master? Still at his word she will let down the net; until his grace, bound by no law of proportion to human effort, brings her good fishing again. Despise her as you will, criticize her as you will, but do her the justice to admit that the patience of the fisherman is hers. (R. Knox, *Pastoral Sermons*)

Don't let us imagine that patience means a tame acceptance of the inevitable, sitting down with folded hands and hoping that somehow better times will turn up. It means action, bestirring ourselves and making the best of things; *doing* God's will, not merely submitting to it. "At thy word I will let down the net;" we are to attempt what seems hopeless, what seems hopeless, when we know it is God's will, whether he has made it known to us through conscience, or through revelation, or through the outward circumstances of our lives. As long as we are sure that we are obeying him; that no pride of ours, no neglect, no timidity, no human respect, is preventing us from finding out what his will is. (R. Knox, *Pastoral Sermons*)

We are disheartened, perhaps, over material things; times are less prosperous, and we have to make the best of an income smaller than the income we were accustomed to; some of us can find no work to do, and feel the pinch of poverty nearer to the bone.

Some of us are disheartened over spiritual difficulties, temptations against which we have long fought, it seems unsuccessfully, or dryness in prayer, or perpetually falling short of the standard we had set before ourselves. Some of us are disappointed over favors denied to us in prayer; all the harder to endure because those prayers were not selfishly offered, but

for the needs of others; there is a son who is turning out badly, there is a friend's conversion we have long hoped for, there is an invalid for whose sufferings we asked relief.

The temptation (in any case) is to throw up our hands in despair; to tell ourselves that we have done enough, and that we shall be running our heads up against a brick wall if we try to persevere; we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; very well, we will toil no more.

That is where we want to remember the great "but" of St Peter's utterance; "*but* at thy word I will let down the net." "Casting all your care upon him, for he hath care of you;" so St Peter wrote when he was an old man, and in prison, and the Church for which he had labored so hard was being assailed by bitter persecution; he had learned his lesson, that day by the Lake of Galilee, long ago. (R. Knox, *Pastoral Sermons*)

Patience to Begin Over and Over Again

A constant, tenacious struggle is asked of us Christians. We must not give up, even if we meet frequent defeats. A good sportsman does not fight to win but a single victory at the first attempt; he trains for a long time. We too should begin over and over again in the spiritual life. It's a matter of using the right means, patiently, constantly, and persistently; with supernatural stubbornness. With God's help, we will get there. Remember, many great things depend on our perseverance in the struggle.

Once I received this piece of advice: "If you lapse..., don't collapse. Try, try again."

Have patience with everybody, but especially with yourself; concretely, do not lose your peace upon the realization of your imperfections; have always the will to rise again. I am glad to know that you begin again every day; there is no better way to prepare a happy end of one's life than to begin again every day, and never think that one has done enough. (St Francis of Sales, *Epist.*, 139, 1c.)

Return to the Lord as Often as Necessary

"Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until it receives the early and the late rain" (Jas 5:7).

In the interior life, one has to hope and struggle with persevering patience, realizing that this is what pleases God. St Francis de Sales used to say: “One has to suffer, in patience, the setbacks to our perfection, doing whatever we can to make progress in good spirit. We hope with patience, and instead of getting frustrated at having done so little in the past, we try diligently to do more in the future.”⁴ (F. Fernández Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 1, 11)

Virtue is not normally attained through sporadic bursts of effort. Rather is it in the continuity of the effort, the constancy of going on trying each day, each week, helped by grace. “To win the battles of the soul, the best strategy often is to bide one’s time and apply the suitable remedy with patience and perseverance. Make more acts of hope. Let me remind you that in your interior life you will suffer defeats, and you will have ups and downs—may God make them imperceptible—because no one is free from these misfortunes. But our all-powerful and merciful Lord has granted us the precise means with which to conquer... All we have to do is to use them, resolving to begin again and again at every moment, whenever necessary.”⁵

The heart of constancy lies in love; only with love can one be patient⁶ and struggle, without accepting failures and defeats as inevitable, as baffling difficulties that do not have a solution. We cannot become like those Christians who, after many skirmishes and battles, find that “their strength has come to an end; their courage has failed them, when they are only a couple of steps from the fountain of living water.”⁷ (F. Fernández Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 1, 11)

There are three prerequisites for our becoming good ground: to listen with a contrite and humble heart, to be earnest in prayer and mortification, and finally, to be disposed to begin and begin again in the interior battle. We cannot let ourselves become discouraged if the fruits of our struggle are not readily apparent, even after many years of effort. (F. Fernandez Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 5, 9.3)

Discouraged? Why? Is it your sins and miseries? Is it your defeats, at times coming one after another? A really big fall, which you didn’t expect?

Be simple. Open your heart. Look; as yet nothing has been lost. You can still go forward, and with more love, with more affection, with more strength.

Take refuge in your divine sonship; God is your most loving Father. In this lies your security, a haven where you can drop anchor no matter what is happening on the surface of the sea of life. And you will find joy, strength, optimism; victory! (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way of the Cross*, 7th, 2)

Tackling serious matters with a sporting spirit gives very good results.... Did I lose several games? Very well, but—if I persevere—I shall win in the end. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 169)

Take up your cross—Christ’s Cross—daily. Face the challenges of each day with courage. Be determined only in accomplishing your task rightly and well. Strive to succeed. But do not make success the condition of your effort. Do your duty because it is God’s will, not because it flatters your egoism. Only on these conditions will your life produce its transforming effect, and you will be *another Christ*, who “having joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb 12:2).

God is interested in you, in your spiritual transformation. He intended this primarily, not whatever work he may effect through you. God is more interested in yourself than in your work. (E. Leen, *In the Likeness of Christ*)

Restlessness

We often become restless because we are no objective. In those situations we must let time pass, pray, until we get to look at those events in the way God looks at them.

You are restless. Look; happen what may in your interior life or in the world around you, never forget that the importance of events and of people is very relative. Take things calmly. Let time pass; and then, as you view persons and events dispassionately and from afar, you’ll acquire the perspective that will enable you to see each thing in its proper place and in its true proportion.

If you do this, you’ll be more objective and you’ll be spared many a cause of anxiety. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 702)

It is good that your soul should be eaten up by that impatience. But don't be in a hurry. God wants you to prepare yourself carefully, taking all the months or years necessary; he is counting on your decision to do so. With good reason did that emperor say: "Time and myself against any other two." (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 783)

"The patient man is better than the valiant." To conquer a city is relatively easy because a city is external to us; but in being patient, a man conquers himself.

"In your patience you shall possess your souls." Reason controls the soul; the soul controls the body. An impatient man is unreasonable; thus, he does not possess his soul. The impatient man cannot even possess himself. (St Gregory the Great, *Book of Pastoral Care*, III, 9)

"A fool speaks out all his mind; a wise man defers and keeps it till afterwards." The impatient soul exposes itself; there is no interior discipline of wisdom to keep it in. The patient man holds back, knowing that all things are punished justly at the last judgment, thus he does not grieve. (St Gregory the Great, *Book of Pastoral Care*, III, 9)

With impatience comes arrogance. The arrogant man is unable to tolerate contempt; one ostentatiously boasts of and advertises himself. The patient man would rather suffer than expose his good works falling in the evil of ostentation. The impatient man would attribute good falsely to himself rather than suffer the slightest evil. (St Gregory the Great, *Book of Pastoral Care*, III, 9)

The impatient man, no matter how violent he may be, is a weak man; when he raises his voice and complains, he really succumbs, from the moral point of view.

The patient man, on the contrary, puts up with an inevitable evil to remain on the right road, to continue his ascent toward God.

Those who bear adversity to attain what their pride desires, do not have the virtue of patience but only its counterfeit, hardness of heart. (R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of Interior Life*)

Footnotes:

¹Cf. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of Interior Life*.

²St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St John*, 36.

³J. Tissot, *The Art of Profiting from our Mistakes*.

⁴J. Tissot, *loc. cit.*

⁵St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 219.

⁶Cf. St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q136, a3

⁷Cf. St Teresa, *The Way of Perfection*, 19,2.

Patience and Interior Struggle

Perseverance in the Ascetical Struggle

On one occasion, Jesus went to the pool of Bethsaida. A paralytic was lying there, for thirty-eight years under his ailment, waiting to be cured. The Lord asked him, "Do you want to be cured?" Jesus did not ask to find out; he knew. It was to manifest the patience of that man who had stayed there for so long, without quitting, hoping to be freed of his sickness.

We, too, must be patient and persevere in the interior struggle to uproot our dominant defect, or in our effort to acquire that basic virtue which seems so difficult to attain. We need patience because Jesus requires of us a long period of fight, a lifetime, perhaps.

A Christian must be patient; he must fortify his heart to be victorious. But once he overcomes vice, he must be stronger and fight harder after the victory to avoid being conquered by the relapse. (St Gregory the Great, *Book of Pastoral Care*, III, 9).

Only the weak and the patient can join God's combats. (Cassian, *Collationes*, 7, 5)

Every single day, do what you can to know God better, to *get acquainted* with him, to fall more in love with him each moment, and to think always of his love and his glory.

You will carry out this plan, my child, if you never, for any reason whatever, give up your times of prayer, your presence of God—with the aspirations and spiritual communions that set you on fire, your unhurried Holy Mass, and your work—finished off well for him. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, 737)

Holiness is attained with the help of the Holy Spirit, who comes to dwell in our souls, through grace given us by the sacraments, and as a result of a constant ascetical struggle.

My son, let us not have any false illusions about this: You and I—I'll never tire of repeating it—will always have to struggle, always, until the end

of our lives. Thus, we will come to love peace, spread peace around us, and receive our everlasting reward. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, 429)

God awaits you. So, wherever you are, you must commit yourself to imitating him and uniting yourself to him, cheerfully, lovingly, keenly, though circumstances might require you—even permanently—to go against the grain.

God awaits you ... and needs your fidelity! (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, 51)

Make an effort to respond at each moment to what God is asking of you; resolve to love him with deeds. They may be little deeds, but do not leave any out. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, 82)

It is not a matter of hurriedly fulfilling your obligations, but of bringing them to a finish without pause, at God's pace. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 791)

The experience of our weaknesses and of our failings, the painful realization of the smallness and meanness of some who call themselves Christians, the apparent failure or aimlessness of some works of apostolate, all these things which bring home to us the reality of sin and human limitation can still be a trial for our faith. Temptation and doubt can lead us to ask: "Where are the strength and the power of God?" When that happens we have to react by practicing the virtue of hope with greater purity and forcefulness, and striving to be more faithful. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, 129)

Do not ask for persecutions to prove your fidelity; it is better to accept the trials that God may send you. Your fidelity must be shown in your humility, serenity, and charity. (St Francis of Sales, *Letters*)

No one should look back, as Lot's wife did; the Lord told us: "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God" (Lk 9:62). To look back is to grieve over the present and to once more relish worldly things. (St Athanasius, *Life of St Anthony*)

There was a man once, who was all fears at one moment, and all hopes the next. At last he threw himself down before the altar, and thus gave expression to the thoughts in his mind: "If I only *knew* that I was going to persevere!"

All at once he heard the divine answer in his heart: "Well, and if you knew, what would you do? Do now what you would do then, and you will be blessed." (*Imitation of Christ*, I,25,2)

I have never found better people than those who persevere in their vocation. I have never found worse people than those who abandoned it. I think the Apocalypse speaks of them saying: "Let him who is holy continue to be holy; let him who is vile continue to be vile" (Apoc 22:11). (St Augustine)

On Acquiring Patience and Battling against Evil Desires

THE LEARNER: Lord God, I can see that patience is something vitally necessary to me because this life abounds in circumstances that thwart my happiness. No matter how carefully I try to live in peace, my days always have their share of conflict and sorrow.

THE BELOVED: That is so, my son; but the kind of peace I want you to aim at is not one in which temptations are not present or difficulties not felt. You will find peace only after having been harassed by various temptations and tested by much adversity. If you say you cannot stand much suffering, how are you going to stand the fire of purgatory? Strive to bear patiently for God's sake the evils of this present life. Do you suppose worldly men have next to nothing of suffering? Put the question to those whose lives are rounds of pleasures; you will find that you are wrong.

All the same, you say, they have a lot of fun and follow their own sweet will, so that when they do come up against trouble it doesn't weigh very heavily upon them.

Granted; but even supposing they have whatever they desire, how long do you think that's going to last? Those rich in this world's goods, you know, will fade out like smoke. They will leave not a memory behind of the pleasures that once were theirs.

Even during their lifetime, when such pleasures are the goal of their existence, their enjoyment of them is tinged with bitterness, boredom, and fear. The very objects from which they obtain pleasure often repay them

with pain and unhappiness. In this they are only getting their due; those who throw off all restraint in their pursuit of pleasure cannot expect to enjoy it without feelings of shame, without finding the sweetness of it turning sour to the taste. Ah, how quickly gone, how false such pleasures are, how uncontrolled, how vile!

And yet, their devotees are so fuddled by them, so blinded. They don't see their way. Like dumb beasts, they snatch at the paltry pleasures of this corruptible life, and so bring upon themselves the death of their souls. Do you, then, my son, "not follow the counsel of appetite; and turn your back on your own liking" (Sir 18:30). "Let all your longing be fixed in the Lord; he will give you what your heart desires" (Ps 36:4).

If you knew what true pleasure is, if you longed for a greater outpouring of my comfort! I tell you this: despise all worldly compensations, cut out of your life all base forms of pleasure, and you will be blessed for it. Be more than repaid by the comfort with which I shall flood your heart. The more you withdraw from the comfort you find in creatures, the sweeter and stronger will be the comfort you find in me.

To begin with, you will not reach this state without a hard struggle and a certain amount of pain. Lifelong habits will bar your way; acquire virtues that will wrest the victory from them. The body will complain, but a sense of commitment in your soul will hold it in check. The Old Serpent will goad you and work upon your feelings, but prayer and mortification will put him to flight. Moreover, by working in earnest and avoiding idleness, you will block one of his broadest means of access to your heart. (Thomas a Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*, 3, ch. 12)

We Are Never Safe from Temptation in This Life

THE BELOVED: You are never safe from this life, my son; as long as you live, you will always need spiritual weapons. You spend your days among your enemies; the attack may come from any quarter. If you fail to use the shield of patience on every trial, it will not be long before you get wounded.

Besides that, if you neglect to set your heart unwaveringly upon me, with the stark desire of enduring all for my sake, you will be unable to bear the brunt of the assault and will fail to win the palm of victory I award to my blessed ones. You must therefore make your way like a man through all that irritates you. You must strike hard at all that stands in your way. The

man who pushes through is rewarded with the Bread of Heaven, while the fainthearted is left in the depths of his misery.

If you merely try to find rest in this world, you will never reach the rest of life everlasting. It is not long hours of rest you should envision here, but long hours of patient endurance. True peace must be sought not on earth, but in Heaven; not in men, not in other creatures, but in God alone. For the love of God you ought to endure with gladness all that comes your way; toil and sorrow, temptations, afflictions, anxiety, want, weakness, injury and slander, rebuke, humiliation, shame, correction, and scorn. All these things are means of sanctity. They test the man who has newly entered the service of Christ, and go to the making of his heavenly crown. For a swift period of work and self denial I will give a reward that lasts forever; for a brief moment of shame, glory without end.

Do you imagine you will always have spiritual comfort whenever you want it? That was never the way with my saints. What *they* had was a world of trouble, trials innumerable, utter desolation. Yet, for all that, they held out patiently in all that befell them, trusting in God and not in themselves. They did not “count these present sufferings as the measure of that glory which is to be revealed” (Rom 8:18), the prize they hoped to win. Are you asking to have here and now something that many people have only just managed to obtain after much toil and many a tear?

“Wait patiently for the Lord to help you; be brave, and let your heart take comfort” (Ps 26:14). Do not lose courage, do not retreat; be steadfast in giving yourself up, body and soul, for the glory of God. The reward I shall give you will surpass all measure. And in all your troubles I shall be at your side. (Thomas a Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*, 3, ch. 5)

Without our Blessed Mother’s aid, how can we manage to keep up our daily struggle?—Do you seek it constantly? (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 692)

Tiredness in the Ascetical Struggle

There are many tests that patience has to overcome. First the limitations proper to human nature. To reach an objective, one has to toil steadily. Hence one has to overcome tiredness and the inordinate desire to reach the objective right away.

Sometimes we may seem tired of fighting against temptations. The difficulties and opposition seem unsurmountable.

This opposition may be coming from many different causes. At times it may have a real basis such as physical exhaustion, lack of financial means, friction in dealing with others, misunderstandings in professional work, or obstacles in the apostolate. Much more often, though, the opposition arises from our pride and sensuality, which create unnecessary difficulties.

When everything is dark, we must be patient, sincere, docile; we must allow ourselves to be guided. With sincerity and fortitude, we must discover the root, what really separates us from God: perhaps lack of rectitude of intention, self-love, veiled sensuality, or desires of compensation.

Persevere in your life of piety, willingly and with love, even if you feel dry. Don't worry if you find yourself counting the minutes or days still to go before you finish that act of piety or that task, with the turbid delight of the lazy schoolboy who in similar situation is looking forward to the end of the term, or of the petty criminal who can't wait to get back to his tricks once he is out of jail again.

Persevere—I insist—with a real and effective determination. Don't cease, not even for a moment, to want to fulfil and benefit from those means of piety. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, 447)

You are ashamed before God, and before the others. You have discovered filth within yourself, both old and renewed; there is no evil instinct or tendency that you do not feel under your skin. And you also carry a cloud of uncertainty in your heart. Furthermore, temptation arises when you least want it or expect it, when your will is weakened by tiredness.

You no longer know if it really humiliates you, although it hurts you to see yourself like this. Let it hurt you because of Him, and for Love of Him; this contrition of love will help you to remain vigilant, for the fight will last as long as we live. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, 174)

I must warn you against a ploy of *satan*—yes, not in capital letter, because he deserves no more—who tries to make use of the most ordinary circumstances to turn us away, slightly or greatly from the path that leads us to God.

If you struggle, and even more if you are truly dedicated in this struggle, you should not be surprised at feeling tired or having sometimes to

“go against the grain,” without any spiritual or human consolation. This is what someone wrote to me some time ago; I kept it for those who naively consider that grace does away with nature: “Father, for a few days now I have been feeling a laziness and tremendous apathy in fulfilling the plan of life. I have to force myself to do everything, and have very little enthusiasm. Pray for me so that this crisis may soon pass, for it makes me suffer a lot to think it could make me turn from my path.”

I answered only: “Didn’t you know that Love demands sacrifice?” Read the words of the Master slowly, “Whoever does not take up his Cross *cotidie*—every day—is not worthy of Me.” And further on, “I will not leave you orphans....” Our Lord allows that dryness of yours, which you find so hard, for you to love Him more, to trust only in Him, to co-redeem with the Cross, to meet Him. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 149)

I once heard of a curious thing that reoccurs in great battles. Although victory may be certain beforehand because of the superiority in numbers and means, later, in the heat of combat, there are times when defeat threatens through the weakness of one flank. Then peremptory orders come from the high command, and the breach is covered in the threatened flank.

I thought about you and me. With God, who does not lose battles, we will always be the victors. Thus, in the struggle for sanctity, if you feel lacking in strength, listen to the commands, do what you are told, let yourself be helped,... for He does not fail. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 151)

“*Beatus vir qui suffert tentationem....*” Blessed is the man who suffers temptation for, after he has been tested, he will receive the crown of Life.

Is your heart not filled with joy when you realize that this interior challenge is an inexhaustible fountain of peace? (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 160)

How to Grow in Patience

True patience is not merely a character trait of a cautious person. It is part of the fortitude of one who fights to avoid being overcome with sadness and distress by the ordinary difficulties of life.

To acquire patience and make it thrive we must:

- *Accept the Will of God*, who knows better than we what is good for us; thus, he sometimes sends us sufferings and hardships.

- *Consider the patience of God* suffering and tolerating our sinful way of life; we should make reparation by voluntarily accepting suffering in atonement for our sins.

- *Contemplate Christ's patience* during his life and in his Passion, suffering for us; a sincere desire to imitate him should be born in our hearts.

- *Consider the patience of the saints*, especially of our Lady, incomparable model of patience.

- *Recall the blessings resulting from this virtue*. In this life, it makes up for our past sins; in the next life, an eternity of happiness awaits us if we know how to suffer with patience. The suffering passes, the merit remains.

- *Recall the misfortunes that result from impatience*. It does not lessen the evil we face, but increases the number and weight of the trials we bear; often that impatience itself becomes a worse torment than the evil we encounter.

- *Consider the sins provoked by impatience*, especially sins against charity.

When you feel the sting of impatience and are overtaken by sadness in tribulations and humiliations, stand firm against this temptation. Remember your many sins, for which you deserve much harsher punishments than those you are now enduring. Adore the infinite justice of God and receive his blows with docility; these are your sources of mercy and grace.

If only you understood how good it is to be wounded in this wretched life by the hand of such a sweet Father as God, certainly you would abandon yourself completely into his hands. Repeat often with St Augustine: "Here in this life, burn and cut in me whatever you wish; do not spare me any suffering here; forgive me and spare me the sufferings of eternity." To refuse tribulations is to rebel against the justice of our Father God, to reject the chalice that he mercifully offers us and from which Christ himself—although innocent—wanted to drink first. (G. Pecci [Pope Leo XIII], *The Practice of Humility*, 35)

Through the exercise of the virtue of patience, acts of mortification will flow that will make the patient soul a humble soul, and one very much united to God, if the trials are embraced out of love of God.

Patience and Fortitude

How Patience and Fortitude Are Related

The passage in the gospel where the Lord intimates the struggles and sufferings that his disciples will face concludes: “Through patience you will command your soul” (Lk 21:19).

To command, one needs fortitude; patience appears in our Lord’s words as a necessary component of fortitude.

Fortitude of soul is frequently exercised under the form of patience. In Christian life, patience should also be united to meekness and serenity;¹ and all these virtues should be at the service of charity.²

We may regard this correlation of patience with fortitude as incongruous; it is because we often have the wrong idea of patience—we often think it is passivity—and easily mistake fortitude for activism. We habitually think that patience is an indiscriminate, self-immolating, crabbed, joyless, and spineless submission to whatever evil we encounter or, worse, deliberately seek out.

Patience, however, is something quite other than the indiscriminate acceptance of any evil. Insensitivity or hardheartedness may occur when the soul is neither moved nor affected by calamities that befall us and those around us, not because one possesses the virtue of steadfastness, but rather because of the absence of human and social sensitivity.

To be patient means to preserve cheerfulness and serenity of mind in spite of injuries that may result from doing good. Patience does not exclude energetic, forceful activity, but simply, sadness and confusion of heart. Patience keeps man from being broken by grief and losing his greatness; it is not the tear-veiled mirror of a “broken” life but the radiant embodiment of ultimate integrity.

St Thomas³ relates patience to the virtue of fortitude; patience is a kind of fortitude that leads us to follow the dictates of our right reason illumined by faith, without yielding to difficulties or sadness.

The man who is brave is also patient. But the reverse is not always true; patience by itself is not the whole of fortitude. The brave man not only knows how to bear inevitable evil with equanimity; but he will also not

hesitate to “pounce upon” evil and to bar its way, if this can reasonably be done.

This attitude requires readiness to attack, courage, self-confidence, and hope of success. There is an element of self-confidence in fortitude; it is the hope that a man puts in himself, naturally in subordination to God.⁴

The life of a Christian is a struggle for sanctity; our goal is heaven. To maintain oneself in the battle, one needs an intense love for the goal, and the virtue of fortitude all throughout. We cannot be like the seed of the parable that fell on the wayside: negligent, lukewarm, and self-complacent. Such negligence and lukewarmness is a lack of strength.

Our fortitude finds its support in God. We need this virtue to begin and to finish our work—every day—with the same enthusiasm as the first day. And if there is no enthusiasm, carry on; it will be more meritorious.

If God lays the burden upon you, God will also give you the strength to bear it. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, 325)

“I can do all things in Him who strengthens me.” With Him, there is no possibility of failure; from this conviction, a holy *superiority complex* rises whereby we take on our task with a winner’s spirit, because God grants us his strength. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, 337)

We cannot, must not, be easy-going Christians; on earth, there must be sorrow and the Cross. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, 762)

As a child of God, with his grace in you, you have to be a strong person, a man or woman of desires and achievements.

We are not greenhouse plants. We live in the middle of the world, and we have to face up to all the winds, to the heat and the cold, to rain and storms, but always faithful to God and to his Church. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, 792)

Very few—only the saints—have the fortitude to face that life or that action in life, in which they foresee that nothing awaits them but to be regarded by the others as failures. (J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*)

Patience as a virtue should not be understood to mean passivity in the face of suffering. It is not a matter of stoically accepting the blows of outrageous fortune and accepting our fate. Patience belongs to the virtue of fortitude. When we practice patience, we strive to accept pain and trial as something coming from the hand of God. We therefore seek to identify our will with the Will of God. The virtue of patience enables us to endure persecution of every kind. Patience should be the foundation of our hope and joy. (F. Fernández Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 5, 94)

The virtue of fortitude leads us to be patient when unpleasant things happen and we are given bad news. Fortitude leads us to be patient in dealing with the obstacles that each day brings with it.

Facing someone's fault, we will know how to wait for the right moment to give a fraternal correction. It is not proper to a Christian who lives in the presence of his Father God to display bitterness, bad temper or gloominess when he is made to wait unduly, or when unforeseen circumstances cause him to change his plans at the last moment, or when he is confronted with the little (or big) failures that every normal life will include. (F. Fernández Carvajal, *In Conversation With God*, 3)

Footnotes:

¹See chapter 16.

²See chapter 12.

³*Summa Theologiae*, IIa IIae, q. 136, a. 1.

⁴Cf. J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*.

Patience and Charity

Patience and Charity

The soul of Christian patience is charity; only love can make us endure and overcome sadness for the loss or delay of a good. And this love should result in confidence as children of God.

We must be charitable and patient with the persons we deal with daily. Sometimes, they may have defects, even big sins.... But a sick person is not yet a corpse ready for the cemetery. Let us cure him by giving him the appropriate treatment. We have—in the Church—all the medicine we need to cure any sickness.

But we must apply the treatment with charity and patience. Otherwise it will not attain its effect. If we take away patience, charity withers away. There is no true charity without a patience that endures everything. When these two virtues are found together, everything is endured joyfully.

Charity accomplishes everything. Without it, there's "nothing doing."

Love, then, is the secret of your life. Love; suffer gladly; toughen up your soul; invigorate your will; link your self-surrender tightly to the Will of God, and with this you will be effective. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, 100)

Patience must be shown toward loved ones. Without patience, love for them can turn into the worst kind of hatred. That is why "charity is kind." Charity leads us to endure the weaknesses of the others with patience; thus, it also leads us to love them with unceasing kindness. "Let all bitterness, anger, indignation, commotion, and blasphemy be put away from you, with all malice,"... because you can put away outward bitterness yet maintain malice. (St Gregory the Great, *Book of Pastoral Care*, III, 9)

It is sometimes a duty to feel annoyed; sometimes, a weakness. But let it last only for a few minutes. And always with charity, with affection. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 821)

How to Admonish the Impatient and the Patient

The impatient must be warned that their impatience is leading them to act as if not knowing what they are doing, only to feel regret when later they realize what they have done. Tell them that, under the impulse of their impatience, they have behaved other than they are. In their agitation, they have nullified the good they may have done.

Charity is lost when one is impatient; “charity is patient.” Therefore, when patience is lacking, there is no charity. And since patience is the nurse of knowledge, the impatient man cannot acquire knowledge. The less patient a man proves to be, the less instructed does he show himself to be. An impatient man cannot truly learn what is good. (St Gregory the Great, *Book of Pastoral Care*, III, 9)

Patience When Confronting the Defects of Others

There are occasions where we are confronted with persons having an opposite point of view or opinion, or having undeniable defects. Instead of getting upset, these are opportunities to exercise the virtue of patience.

Besides, God does not cease warning and guiding us. If God is so patient with us, shall we not be patient with the others?

Through patience, the good earth yields good fruits; our good works have no value if we are intolerant of our neighbors’ faults. (St Gregory the Great, *Hom. 15 On the Gospels*)

As long as we deal with men, we shall never lack in occasions where we are confronted with persons having an opposite point of view or opinion. The constant contact makes it inevitable. Do not make these differences a reason to avoid their company. (Cassian, *Inst.*, 9, 7)

We must support those that we correct, and correct those that we support. (St Gregory the Great, *Hom. 17 On the Gospels*)

Whenever we have contact with other people we will encounter opportunities to exercise the virtue of patience. This is certainly the case when we help people to receive spiritual formation or when we tend to people who are sick. Let us always be understanding about the defects of others. So many of our neighbors are sincerely trying to improve. They may be trying to master an unfortunate temperament, a lack of education, or mistaken notions.

If some of our friends habitually give in to their defects, this can have an upsetting effect on us. We may then give way to our impatience and thereby damage our friendship, perhaps irreparably. Charity will help us to be patient with others and to correct people when necessary.

When we get flustered, though, let us not react right away. We should take a deep breath, smile, do whatever has to be done, and take our concerns to the Sacred Heart. Jesus looks upon our struggle with great sympathy and compassion. (F. Fernández Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 5, 94)

There will always be faults in ourselves, and faults in others, which defy correction; we should put up with them, till God arranges things differently. After all, it may be the best possible way of knowing yourself and testing your patience; and without patience a man's merit amounts to very little. At the same time, you do well to pray about such annoyances; ask God in his mercy to help you bear them calmly.

You do well to cultivate patience in putting up with the shortcomings, the limitations, and weaknesses of other people; only think how much they have to put up with in you!

When you make such a failure of organizing your own life, how can you expect everybody else to be perfect? (Thomas a Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*, I,16,1-2)

Continue making the same exhortation, and never lazily. Always act with kindness and refinement.... Have you noticed how the painters keep on erasing part of their sketches and patiently redoing it, or endlessly retouch here and there until they have a perfect, lovely portrait?

Don't be outclassed by painters. If they devote such care to the reproduction of a bodily image, it is all the more compelling that we should leave no stone unturned to shape patiently our soul—or any soul—after the perfect image of Christ. (St John Chrysostom, *Homilies On St Matthew's Gospel*, 30)

Sometimes we establish friendship with another person; the motive may be some relationship: because he is an acquaintance, because of common interests, for neighborhood, or for any motive. But the real motive

should be supernatural—sanctity—because they are also children of the Church.

But what do you do? Do you call your brother “worthless”? And are you not ashamed—don’t you blush—of exposing your brother, your fellow member of the Body of Christ, him who shares the same birth with you, who has participated of the same sacred table?

If you had a brother of the flesh and he had done ten thousand evil deeds, you would try to hide his faults; you would share his shame willingly. Try to do likewise with your spiritual brother. Free him from slander, rather than heaping ten thousand accusations on him.

—“He is worthless and insufferable,” you say.

—Precisely for this reason, become his friend, to help him put an end to being so. You will convert him and lead him back to virtue.

—“But he does not obey,” you say, “and he does not accept any advice.”

—How do you know? Have you tried to talk to him and give him some help?

—“I have warned him several times,” you say.

—How many times?

—Oftentimes; I talked to him once, and a second time.

—Oh! Is this often? If you were doing this all the time, should you grow weary and give up? Don’t you see how God is always warning us? He guides us by the prophets, the apostles, and the evangelists. What then? Have we done everything as he demanded? Have we been obedient in all things? By no means. Did God cease to guide us? Did he stop being patient with us? No.

Jesus said, “You cannot serve God and mammon,” and yet, how many are busy only in increasing their personal pleasure with superfluous caprices, and become subjects of the tyranny of wealth?

He said, “Forgive, and you shall have forgiveness,” and yet, we often become wild beasts and worse still.

He told us to restrain desire and to keep the mastery over wicked lust, and how many wallow worse than swine in this sin?

But, nevertheless, God does not cease warning and guiding us. If God is so patient with us, shall we not be patient with the others? (St John Chrysostom, *Homilies On St Matthew’s Gospel*, 59)

Patience with Those Who Treat Us Unjustly

Patience and serenity are particularly meritorious when practiced toward those who make us suffer. Only then will these virtues be truly supernatural, without any admixture of vain sensibility. These virtues are a sign of having the right intention and a supernatural outlook; they often have a profound effect on a violent, irritated neighbor, disarming him.

Our Lord did not say, “If someone has injured you, do not seek vengeance,” but, “Give yourself to him who injures you.” This is a true act of compassion that is well understood by those who are serving some much loved person, such as sons, little children, the insane, or any sick loved one. Those who take care of the sick must be ready to suffer to no small degree, and patiently endure even more, if necessary, until the day that the infirmity caused by illness or age is overcome.

The Lord is the physician of souls; following Jesus’ footsteps, every Christian is tasked to cure his brethren. What else could Jesus do but to inculcate in us that we should bear with equanimity the weaknesses of those whose salvation we are trying to obtain? (St Augustine, *On the Sermon on the Mount*, 1)

Maintain always true humility of heart; it consists, not in demonstrations and artificial speech, but in a profound abasement of the soul. This humility is revealed through patience, which is its consequence and its most evident sign. I am not talking of being patient when others accuse you of crimes that no one would believe, but of remaining calm when you face insolent accusations, and of enduring offenses with meekness and serenity. (Cassian, *Collationes*, 18, 11)

True patience and tranquility of soul can only be acquired and consolidated with a profound humility of heart. Virtues flowing from such a spring need not be kept in the retirement of a cell or in the shelter of solitude. In fact, they do not need an external buttress if they are internally supported by humility, the mother and safeguard of all virtues. But if we feel offended when provoked, it is a sign that the foundations of our humility are not stable. (Cassian, *Collationes*, 18, 13)

So you’ve been hauled over the coals? Don’t follow the advice of pride and lose your temper. Think: How charitable they are toward me! The

things they've left unsaid! (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 698)

Jesus Christ himself, who new the malice of the Pharisees, was patient with them, to win them over, as a good physician bestows more attention to, and prescribes the strongest medicine for, the most gravely ill. (St Cyril, in *Catena Aurea*, 4)

The beginning and the end of Judas' betrayal were both associated with Christ as the Bread of Life. The first record of the betrayal of Judas was not at the Last Supper, but when our Blessed Lord announced himself as the Bread of Life at the beginning of his public life. St John tells us: "Jesus knew from the first which were those who did not believe, and which of them was to betray him" (Jn 6:65).

The hand on the dial was already pointing to the hour of his death; from that moment on, our Blessed Lord endured the presence of the one who would betray him. (F. J. Sheen, *Life of Christ*)

One of the strongest expressions of the sorrows of our Lord was used during the Last Supper to describe Jesus' love for Judas and his freely willed doom: "Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, 'I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me'" (Jn 13:21). The "one of you" was one whose feet he had washed, one whom he called to the apostolic office of spreading his Church throughout the world after the coming of his Spirit, one whose presence he suffered so patiently that no one of the other apostles knew who it was. "His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant" (Jn 13:22).

Humanly speaking, it would seem that our Lord should have thundered out his denunciation of Judas, but rather in a last attempt to save him he used the bread of fellowship. "Jesus replied, 'The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me'" (Mt 26:23).

Evil men seem to run counter to the economy of God and to be an errant thread on the tapestry of life, but they all fit some way into the divine plan. The wild wind roars from the black heavens, and somewhere there is a sail to catch it and yoke it to the useful service of man. (F. J. Sheen, *Life of Christ*)

The bread given to Judas must have burned his lips, as the thirty pieces of silver later on would burn his hands. A few minutes before, the hands of the Son of God had washed the feet of Judas; now the same divine hands touch the lips of Judas with a morsel; in a few hours, the lips of Judas will kiss the lips of our Lord in the final act of betrayal. The divine Mediator, knowing all that would befall him, gave the order to Judas to open the curtain wider on the tragedy of Calvary. What Judas was to do, let him do quickly. The Lamb of God was ready for sacrifice.

The divine mercy did not identify the traitor, for our Lord hid from the apostles the fact that the betrayer was Judas. The world that loves to spread scandals—even those that are untrue—is here reversed even in the hiding of what is true. When others saw Judas leave, they assumed it was because he was on a mission of charity, or buying what was needed for the feast.

But Judas, instead of going to buy, went out to sell; nor was it to the poor he would minister, but to the rich in charge of the temple treasury.

Even though our blessed Lord knew the evil intention of Judas, he nevertheless acted kindly because he would bear the ignominy alone.

Jesus knew who would believe him not and who would betray him, yet this did not harden his Sacred Heart. Judas rejected the last appeal, and from that time on there was only despair in his heart. (F. J. Sheen, *Life of Christ*)

An Eye for an Eye?

“Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times’” (Mt 18:21-22).

Jesus is teaching us to be patient with the weaknesses of the others, in the same measure that God has forgiven us. God has forgiven us many offenses. We have no right to harbor resentment against anyone. We have to learn to forgive with all our heart. Our pardon should be sincere, profound, and prompt.

Sometimes we feel hurt for no objective reason, but only because our self-love has been bruised. If we have indeed been seriously offended, we must remember our own serious transgressions against the Lord.

Christ “does not accept the offering of those who foster division. He sends them away from the altar to make peace and achieve reconciliation. God wants to be given prayer of peace. His greatest objective is our peace, social harmony, and the unity of the faithful in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”¹

The parable of the unforgiving servant shows how easy it is to forgive. The servant who owed his master ten thousand talents signifies the man who has sinned against God. The ten thousand talents signify the enormity or grievousness of the sin. The co-servant who owed the unforgiving servant one hundred talents signifies the man who has sinned against man; the one hundred talents signify the lightness of such sins. (St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St Matthew's Gospel*)

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

The servant fell on his knees before him. “Be patient with me,” he begged, “and I will pay back everything.”

The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt, and let him go. (Mt 18:23-27).

Considering the ten thousand talents, let us at least hasten to pardon our neighbors their few and unimportant debts. For we, too, have to give an account of the observance of the commandments entrusted to us, and of the use of our talents. We owe God a great debt. None of us can pay it.

But God has given us a way to repay. It is easy and practical: to be patient with the others, to forgive as God has forgiven us. (St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St Matthew's Gospel*)

The master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

Why? Not out of cruelty or callousness, but out of unspeakable tenderness did he decide so. After all, the material loss would fall on himself, because the slave's wife was his slave, too.

The servant fell on his knees before him. “Be patient with me,” he begged, “and I will pay back everything.”

The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt, and let him go.

The master’s purpose was not to sell the slave, but to alarm him by this threat, so that the slave would come to him with supplication. If the master wanted merely to sell the slave, he would not have consented to his request, neither would he have granted the favor.

But why, then, did the master not cancel the debt before the settlement or immediately after rendering the account? The master was making the slave aware of the huge obligation he was being delivered from, so that the slave will learn to be mild toward his fellow servant. (St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St Matthew’s Gospel*, 61)

The master was moved with compassion, loosed him, and forgave him the debt. Do you notice the master’s benevolence? The slave asked only for a delay in the payment; the master gave more than asked, remission and cancellation of the entire debt.

The master wanted to forgive from the beginning, but he did not desire that the gift may be only his, he wanted that it may be worked also by the petition of the slave, so that the slave may be crowned also. He wanted the slave to be seen as contributing something, to spare him from shame. Finally, the master wanted the slave—schooled in these hardships—to be compassionate toward the other fellow servants.

Up to this point, the slave appears good and acceptable. He confessed, promised to pay, fell on his knees, begged, condemned his own misdeeds, and acknowledged the greatness of the debt. But the sequel is unworthy of his repentance.

Even after this lesson, *When that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. “Pay back what you owe me!” he demanded* (Mt 18:28).

The benefit received was still fresh upon him, yet he abused with malice the gift and freedom granted to him by his master.

If the master had not disciplined him beforehand, into what depth of cruelty would have the slave fallen?

The sin of the unforgiving servant was that he did not forgive the insignificant sins of his co-servant. His sin became worse when he choked the co-servant; and it was made ten times more grievous because he threw the co-servant into prison until he could pay. In the same way did the master treat him as he had treated his neighbor.

God will treat you in exactly the same way as you have treated your neighbor. Let us then be patient and forgiving if we want to obtain mercy from God. (St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St Matthew's Gospel*)

What did the second slave say? *His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, "Be patient with me, and I will pay you back"* (Mt 18:29).

Do you see the master's goodness? Do you see the slave's cruelty? The slave did not pay attention to these words; the same words by which he was delivered from the debt of ten thousand talents. He did not recognize the harbor by which he escaped from shipwreck; the gesture of supplication did not remind him of his master's kindness. He put away from him all these considerations. Covetous, cruel, and revengeful, he was more brutal than any wild beast, seizing his fellow servant by the throat.

We must tell him, "What are you doing, man? Don't you realize that you are thrusting a sword into yourself, and revoking your master's sentence and the gift?" But none of these things did he consider. He did not remember his own state; he did not yield.

But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt (Mt 18:30)

The one owed ten thousand talents; the other, a hundred denarii. The one owed them to his lord; the other to his fellow servant. The one received entire forgiveness; the other, begging for a delay, was cast into prison.

When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened (Mt 18:31)

Not even men accepted this impatience, much less God. Those who did not owe shared the grief. (St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St Matthew's Gospel*, 61)

What did the master say? *Then the master called the servant in. "You wicked servant," he said, "I canceled all that debt of yours because you*

begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" (Mt 18:32-33)

See again the lord's gentleness. He excuses himself at the point of revoking the gift; or rather, it was not he who revoked it, but the wicked servant with his impatience.

*In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you, unless you forgive your brother from your heart (Mt 18:34-35). (St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St Matthew's Gospel*, 61)*

The gravity of a sin depends on three factors:

- On the dignity of the person offended. It is more grievous to offend God directly than to offend a man.

- On the number of times it has been committed. It is more grievous to sin ten times a day than once a day.

- On the capacity and blessings the sinner has received. The sins of those who have received many blessings from God are more grievous than the sins of those who have received less blessings.

Consider the sinner's foolishness. When a man is watching us, we stand off and shrink from sinning. But when God sees us, we sin without fear.

Consider the ten thousand talents or even a greater sum we owe God, and compare it with the generous forgiveness God has granted us. We behave like fools either by sinning without limit, or by despairing of God's mercy. We are wise when we judge rightly the gravity of our sins, and ponder on the power of true repentance. (St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St Matthew's Gospel*)

Man is ungrateful. God gave us the sky, the sun, the stars, and the earth, when we were still in sin, unreconciled with him. Met with further ingratitude, God even gave us his Son, and made us sons of God; we were then enemies, unthankful, and unreconciled with him. Upon the rejection of his Son, God still gave us baptism and penance for the remission of sins and the attainment of eternal life.

Think, Christian soul, how great is your debt; meditate constantly on Christ's commands, which you often have broken. To pay this great debt you are only required to forgive the petty debts of your neighbors.

Shouldn't you be patient with them, as God has been patient with you? (St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St Matthew's Gospel*)

Let us examine our reaction when people "rub us the wrong way." To follow Christ in ordinary life is to find in this very area a broad road to serenity. We should take care to avoid even the most minute fault against charity. The small contradictions of social life should not detract from our happiness.

If there comes a time when we have to forgive someone as the result of a serious offense, it is then we will do well to recall the behavior of Jesus who asked pardon for those who crucified him. We will thus savor the true love of God. Our heart will be enriched and expanded in its capacity to love. We cannot forget that "nothing makes us more like unto God than to be ever ready to pardon others."² Our generosity toward others will win for us the divine pardon. (F. Fernandez Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 5,41)

If someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well (Mt 5:40).

Do you think this is a great thing? Wait and you will see that you have not reached perfection yet. God does not stop here. He is laying down the laws of patient endurance as he continues,

If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles (Mt 5:41).

Do you see here the climax of self-denial? After giving your tunic, you are told to give your cloak. And then, even your own body should be lent to render a service. Do not even count the person asking for that favor as an enemy, for God did not say, "Do not hate him," but "Love him." He did not say, "Do not harm him," but, "Do good to him." And still, something much greater is added. God did not simply command to love our enemies, but to pray for them. (St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St Matthew's Gospel*, 18)

Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Mt 5:42-44).

Do you see how many steps God has ascended to place us at the summit of virtue? Mark them from the beginning:

- Do not commit injustice,
- Do not vindicate yourself with equal retaliation,
- Do not give to him who is annoying you the same treatment that you have suffered, but be calm,
- Give yourself up to suffer wrongs,
- Do not be afraid of suffering more,
- Do not hate the one who has done wrong to you,
- Even, love him,
- Do good to him also,
- Pray to God for him,

Do you see how high is the level of patience demanded from you? It is as high as the reward promised to you. (St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St Matthew's Gospel*, 18)

Your Father in heaven causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Mt 5:45).

God's patience is so far from hating that he even pours benefits on those who insult him. It is difficult for us to imitate him because of his excellent dignity. You may be despised by your fellow-slave, but God is despised by his slave, who—besides—has received so many benefits from him. You may utter words pardoning your enemy, but He kindles the sun, and gives us annual showers, and all sorts of marvelous gifts.

Do not hate the man who does wrong to you, for he is procuring you so many good things and bringing you so much honor. Do not curse the person who humiliates you; after undergoing the abuse, you may be deprived of the fruit; after bearing the loss, you may lose the reward. (St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St Matthew's Gospel*, 18)

“But how is it possible,” one may inquire, “to forgive the man who abuses you?”

Having seen your God become man and suffer so much for your sake, do you not know how to forgive your fellow-servant? Do you still ask how? Do you not hear Him on the Cross, saying, “Forgive them, for they do not know what they do”? Do you not see how after the Cross, and the resurrection, your God sent the apostles to the Jews, who had slain him, to

bring them the greatest blessings? And this knowing that the apostles had to suffer ten thousand terrors at their hands? (St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St Matthew's Gospel*, 18)

Have you been gravely wronged? Still you have not endured like your Lord, bound, beaten with whips, with rods, spat upon by servants, enduring death—that shameful death—after so many favors imparted.

Even if you have been gravely wronged, do good to him; you will make your crown more glorious and set your brother free from his sickness. Do as the physicians do; even when they are kicked and attacked by the insane, they try to cure them, knowing that their fury is a consequence of the disease.

Help him to let go his anger, set him free from that grievous demon, wrath. The enraged are like the possessed, even more wretched than they, being mad with consciousness of it. Their frenzy is, thus, without excuse. (St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St Matthew's Gospel*, 18)

If they annoy you fifty thousand times, that's how often you have to forgive them.... Your patience has to get ahead of your bad feelings, wearing them out before they provoke more harm. (St John of Avila, *Sermon 25, for the 25th Sunday after Pentecost*)

Footnotes:

¹St Cyprian, *Treatise on the Lord's Prayer*.

²St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St Matthew's Gospel*, 19.

Patience in the Apostolate

Patience with Those We Regularly Deal With

“Charity is patient.” We must have patience with those we deal with on a regular basis. This is particularly relevant if, for special reasons, we must assist in their development, or help them in sickness. We must be patient in spite of their defects, ill temper, lack of good manners, and obstinacy. If, after some time, these conditions lead us to lose our patience, we will lack charity, comradeship will be shattered, and our labors on their behalf will be rendered ineffective.

To carry out a work for souls, we must be patient. Things need not come out at the moment or in the way we prefer, but at the moment and in the manner God wants them to happen. Besides, if God has been so patient with us, how can we not be patient with the others?

A Christian should be patient in his dealing with the others by moderating his desire for achievements. The following is to be done:

- To live the virtues of patience and obedience by being ready to undertake hard and unattractive tasks. A patient and humble person is a team worker.

- To willingly accept instructions from a superior, and to obey out of love of God. Faith helps in seeing God acting through one's superior.

- Not to indulge oneself in fulfilling one's own likings and inclinations.

Understanding and fortitude will help us to be patient, while allowing us to correct our friends at the opportune moment. Our words will reach their hearts and help them to overcome their defects if we wait for the suitable time, smile, and provide well-founded answers. Impatience only creates obstacles, and is totally ineffectual.

At times we will have to tolerate certain minor evils in order to avoid greater ones and not end in useless bitterness and criticism. What is less good should not be classed as evil; the smoking flax should not be extinguished nor the broken reed crushed. Often Divine Providence allows

evil in view of a superior good, which we do not yet see, but which will come out eventually.

Apostolic zeal should be not only edifying, but also patient and meek. Patience and serenity make advice and corrections acceptable. In vain will we have apostolic zeal if we are not serene; we will seem to speak through passion rather than reason and love of God; thus, we will accomplish nothing.

Patience also helps us to be understanding with other people, when it seems they do not improve or that they are simply not interested in mending their ways. It leads us always to treat them with charity, with human appreciation, and with supernatural outlook.

Anyone in charge of the formation of others (parents, teachers, superiors) has a particular need for patience, because “governing often consists in knowing how, with patience and affection, to ‘draw good’ out of people.”¹ This advice can help all of us to examine ourselves in our personal prayer. “Each day you must behave towards those around you with genuine understanding, with great affection, together, of course, with all the energy this will call for. Otherwise understanding and affection become complicity and selfishness.”²

Charity is never weakness, and fortitude should never assume an aspect that is peevish, harsh, or ill-humored. (F. Fernandez Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 3)

Bearing Fruit

“Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient until it receives the early and the late rain. Do you also be patient; strengthen your hearts; for the coming of the Lord is at hand” (Jas 5:7-8).

We must labor to obtain the fruit of sanctity in each of us and in all those around us. When God wishes, he sends the rain of his grace to souls. We must pray, work with effort, and, at the same time, have patience. Souls need time to reach sanctity, and God has infinite patience with each of us.

Christ communicated his power to his disciples; he wanted them to be constituted in royal liberty, and overcome the reign of sin in themselves by self-denial and a holy life (cf. Rom 6:12). By serving Christ in others his disciples must—in humility and patience—bring their brethren to Christ the

King; to serve him is to reign. (Second Vatican Council, Dogm. Cons. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 36)

When the miracle was all over, our Lord explained the meaning of it to his apostles. “From henceforth,” he said, “you will be catching men.” Our vocation as Christians does not starve or supersede our natural characters; it directs them and consecrates them to the service of God. Peter is a fisherman; very well, then a fisherman let him remain; only in future let him fish for men.

Why did our Lord number so many fishermen among his twelve apostles? Fishermen, after all, have not a very good reputation for telling the truth; and some of them are idle natures into the bargain. What is the quality our Lord saw in them? One thing, I think, which he prized especially in those who were to be his apostles: an indomitable patience. “In your patience”, he says to them, “you shall win souls.”

They have toiled all night and have caught nothing; weary hours of waiting, in the hope that the gray light of dawn will bring sport—and it has brought none. What, put out to sea again under the burning sun of midday, when the very hull of the boat must cast shadows that will scare away the fish to right and left? Yes; “at thy word I will let down the net.” There is no limit to Peter’s optimism and Peter’s endurance, so long as he is following his Master’s orders. It is in that patience that he won, and wins, men’s souls. (R. Knox, *Pastoral Sermons*)

Governing often consists in knowing how to steer people and extract good out of them, with patience and affection. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 405)

The Patience of God

The Lord tells a parable in the Gospel using for its setting a situation which was very familiar to the inhabitants of Palestine: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none” (Lk 13:6-9). The man then expressed his frustration to the vinedresser: “Lo, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?”

The fig tree symbolizes Israel, the Chosen People who had failed to correspond to Yahweh’s countless invitations (cf. Hos 9:10). Yahweh is the

owner of the vineyard. The fig tree represents anyone who does not heed the Lord's call to bear fruit (cf Jer 8:13). The Lord places the tree in the best location for bearing fruit. He provides all the attention and graces required.

God assists us from the very moment of our conception. He gives us a Guardian Angel to protect us all our days. He gives us the immense grace of Baptism, perhaps a few days after our birth. He gives himself to us in Holy Communion and through the entire course of our Christian formation.... Then there are innumerable gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit that we have received.

Despite all this care and cultivation, it is possible that the Lord may find we have borne little fruit in our life. Maybe he will find only bitter fruit. It is possible that our personal situation may reflect that prophetic metaphor of Isaiah: "Let me sing for my beloved a love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes" (Is 5:1-2).

The vineyard produced sour fruit. What was the reason for this bad harvest, when everything had been done to ensure that it would be a good one? St Ambrose wrote that the cause of spiritual sterility can frequently be traced to pride and hardness of heart.

In spite of the disappointments God returns with renewed generosity time and time again to look for results. This is the *patience of God* (cf 2 Pet 3:9) towards souls. He does not become discouraged by our lack of correspondence. He knows how to wait. He sees our faults and failings but he also sees our capacity for doing good. The Lord never gives up on any soul. He trusts us through thick and thin.

God himself has promised through the prophet Isaiah: "A bruised reed He will not break, and a dimly burning wick He will not quench" (Is 42:3). The pages of the Gospel are a continuous testimony to this consoling truth: the parable of the prodigal son, that of the lost sheep, the meeting with the Samaritan woman, and that with Zacchaeus. (F. Fernández Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 5, 54)

What God Expects of Us

"Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure. And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it

down.” It is Jesus who intercedes for us before God the Father, since we are the fig tree planted in the vineyard of the Lord. St Augustine commented: “The vinedresser intervenes. He steps in when the axe is about to fall upon the sterile root. He intercedes like Moses before God.... He who acts as mediator is full of mercy.”³ “Let it alone, sir, this year also....” How many times has this scene been repeated: Lord, give us another chance! “To realize that you love me so much, my God, and yet I haven’t lost my mind!”⁴ (F. Fernández Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 5, 54)

The parable of the fig-tree warns us that there is a limit to the long-suffering patience of almighty God. But it seems, from what we hear of the gardener, that there is room for intercession; it appears that we can prolong the Lord’s forbearance through our prayers. Without a doubt, this is very important. We can win some time for sinners to repent. (R. A. Knox, *Pastoral Sermons*, 6)

Each and every person has a specific divine vocation. Every life that is lived without reference to the divine plan is wasted. The Lord awaits our correspondence with his many blessings. Of course, we can never hope to give God as much as he gives us. “Man can never love God as much as He should be loved.”⁵ Nevertheless, with the help of grace we can offer him many fruits of our love: acts of charity, deeds of apostolate, and work well done. When we examine our conscience at night, we should be collecting those little fruits to put before the Lord. Then when we are called to depart from this world, we will leave it a little bit better, a little more beautiful.

Let us examine our conduct; if we were to go before the Lord this very day, would he find our hands full of good fruit? And what about our behavior yesterday? And last week? Perhaps we shall find that our life is brimming with good works done for the love of God. Or we may discover that we have been thinking too much about our own concerns, and that this has been a hindrance to the operation of divine grace.

We know very well that when God does not receive all the glory, life becomes sterile. Everything that is done without God will perish. Let us be sure to make some firm resolutions today. “God may have given us just one more year in which to serve him. Don’t think of one, or even two. Just concentrate on this one year....”⁶ (F. Fernández Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 5, 54)

“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples” (Jn 15:8). This is what God wants from us: not the appearance of fruits, but fruit that will last. This will include people who have returned to the sacrament of Confession, hours of work done well and with right intention, little mortifications at meals, the struggle to be on top of one’s moods, living with a sense of order in cheerful disposition, and little acts of service to people in need. Let us not be satisfied with mere appearances. Can I honestly say that my works correspond with the graces that God has granted me? (F. Fernández Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 5, 54)

Let us intercede before the Lord that he may extend his divine patience on behalf of those sinners with whom we can do apostolate. “We are in no hurry to have the tree cut down. We want it to grow through the Lord’s forbearance, through his mercy. Let us not fell the tree when it can still give much fruit.”⁷ Let us resolve to have patience in our own apostolate. Let us use all the human and supernatural means to bring people closer to Jesus.

Our Mother Mary will obtain the grace we need. She will help us encourage souls to give abundant fruit, especially our friends and members of our family. (F. Fernández Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 5, 54)

Constancy in the Apostolate

See how patient our Lord was with the defects of the apostles. When John and James asked him for the first places in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus did not rebuke them harshly. When Jesus had to correct any fault in his disciples, he did so clearly and with divine firmness, but without ever losing his affection for and patience with that person. Likewise, true charity teaches us to accept others as they are, with their faults and mistakes. Then, with God’s grace, we will try to help them overcome their defects.

In order to remain calm, while we see our friends slowly getting closer to God, we must see things in the light of eternity. We must single out every issue and then apply the remedy with charity and patience.

Patience is needed in our apostolate. God gives the interior increase; without it we will only have unripe, green fruit. We must help others, but at

God's pace. We should do *his* apostolate, not our own. We should not do anything for ourselves, but only God's glory. Our role is that of an instrument: we prepare things for God to act, because "neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the growth" (1 Cor 3:6-7).

If some are slow to respond, let us shower them with affection. We have to know how to *waste time* with them, to strengthen our friendship and facilitate their encounter with God. (F. Fernández Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 2, 28)

We ought to be particularly constant and patient in the apostolate. People need time, and God is patient; he is always ready to give his grace, to pardon offenses, and to encourage progress. He has had, and continues to have, this limitless patience with us. And we ought to have it with those whom we wish to bring to our Lord, although it might seem on occasions that they are not listening, or that the things of God do not interest them. We cannot abandon them just for this reason. On these occasions it will be necessary to intensify both our prayer, and our mortification, our charity, too, and our sincere friendship. (F. Fernández Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 2, 28)

None of our friends should ever be able to tell our Lord in the words of the paralytic: "I do not have anyone to help me." This, unfortunately, could be said by many who are spiritually sick and paralytic, who could be useful—and should be useful.

"Lord, may I never remain indifferent to souls."⁸

Let us ask ourselves if we are sufficiently concerned about those who accompany us on our journey through life; let us ask ourselves if we are concerned about their defects as something we have come to regard as incorrigible; are we really patient towards them?

It would also be good to recall that, with mortification, we can also atone for the sins of others and, in some way, merit for them the grace of faith, of conversion, of a greater dedication to God.

In Jesus Christ lies the remedy for all the evils of which humanity complains. In him everyone can find life and health. He is the fountain of those waters that give life to everything. This is what Ezekiel the prophet tells us: "This water flows east down to the Arabah and to the sea; and

flowing into the sea it makes its waters wholesome. Wherever the river flows, all living creatures teeming in it will live. Fish will be very plentiful, for wherever the water goes it brings health, and life teems wherever the river flows” (Ez 47:8-9). Christ converts into life everything that was previously death, and turns shortcomings and error into virtue.

“Love is patient”—*Caritas patiens est* (1 Cor 13:4). The virtue of patience is an indispensable support for charity. Our apostolate is a clear manifestation of charity. Here patience is essential. The Lord wants us to sow his seed with a great peace of mind. We should remember that he has prepared the field beforehand. Let us be mindful of the rhythm of the seasons. We should wait for the right time and place. Let us not give in to discouragement. Our hope should rest in the Lord. He will make a tiny shoot grow into a fine ear of wheat. (F. Fernández Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 5, 94)

Jesus gives us many examples of how to live patience. The Lord was well aware that the crowds did not grasp the full import of his teaching: “Seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand” (Mt 13:13). Nevertheless, Jesus manifests tireless devotion to these same people. He travels through the length and breadth of Palestine.

It is clear that even the Twelve Apostles had their limitations. The Lord tells them on the eve of his Passion, “I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now” (Jn 16:12). The Lord was understanding towards his disciples. He had patience with their defects and their less than perfect ways. He did not give up on them. In the years to come these same men would be the pillars of his Church. (F. Fernandez Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 5, 94)

Patience and constancy are necessary for any work of spiritual formation, whether aimed at ourselves or at others. Patience is closely allied to the virtue of humility. The patient person accepts the workings of God’s Providence and operates within that general framework. He recognizes his own defects and is not dismayed by the defects of others.

“A Christian who practices the manly virtue of patience will not become disconcerted at the fact that most people are indifferent to the things of God. The truth remains that there are a good many people who

have deep longings to encounter God. Their inner desire may be compared to a wine cellar in which is locked away a very good wine. It so happens that souls are like arable land. The farmer must accommodate himself to the seasons and the soil. Hasn't the Master likened the Kingdom of God to a householder who went out to hire workers for his vineyard? (cf Mt 20:1-7).⁹ (F. Fernandez Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 5, 94)

The Lord has been so incredibly patient with us. Let us be sure to exercise patience towards others in the apostolate. St Paul teaches us: "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things"—*Caritas omnia suffert, omnia credit, omnia sperat, omnia sustinet* (1 Cor 13:7). If we live the virtue of patience we will be faithful. We will become holy and help others to become holy, as many as the blessed Virgin entrusts to our care. (F. Fernandez Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 5, 94)

You must draw from the hidden life of Jesus this further consequence: You must not be in a hurry ... even though you are!

First and foremost, that is, comes the interior life. Everything else—the apostolate, any apostolate—is a corollary. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, 708)

Grace, like nature, normally moves by degree. We cannot, strictly speaking, move ahead of grace. But in all that does depend on us we must lay the groundwork and co-operate with God who grants his grace to us.

Souls have to be encouraged to aim very high; they have to be impelled toward Christ's ideal. Lead them to the highest goals, which should not be reduced or made weaker in any way. But remember that sanctity is not primarily worked out with one's own hands. Grace normally takes its time, and is not inclined to act with violence.

Encourage your holy impatience..., but do not lose your patience. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 668)

We must continue our apostolate even if the fruits are not apparent, if God wants it that way. Others—in the future or in some other part of the world—will reap the fruit of our effort, for at times, "one sows, another reaps" (Jn 4:37). We must be patient with others, because Christ has been even more patient with us.

Footnotes:

¹St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 405.

²St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 805.

³St Augustine, *Sermon* 254,3.

⁴St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 425.

⁵St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1-2, q.6,a.4.

⁶St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 47.

⁷St Gregory Nazianzen, *Catena Aurea*, 6.

⁸St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 212.

⁹J. L. R. Sanchez de Alva, *The Gospel of St John*.

Difficulties

*We carry within us a principle of opposition, of resistance to grace. This is the inclination to sin—the **fomes peccati**—present in us as a consequence of original sin. Thus, we must always be vigilant, patient, ready for the battle, because there will always be difficulties to be overcome coming from within and from without. If we did not have any difficulties, if we did not have to suffer or struggle, there would be no victory. There is no victor, if no one is vanquished.*

Rather than being reasons for discouragement, adversities should be one more spur to our interior growth. In spiritual life, there is only one possible mistake: to be resigned to defeat.

We want peace, but peace is a consequence of victory. And victory demands a constant fight. This protracted struggle must be carried on with full hope in Christ, who overcame evil with his sacrifice in Calvary.

Patience with Oneself

A Christian should exercise patience with himself. It is easy to get discouraged when confronting our own defects, especially if these repeat themselves over and over again, without ever being vanquished. We must know how to wait and struggle with a patient perseverance.

On many occasions, the mastering of a fault or the acquisition of a virtue requires not violent, sporadic efforts, but patient, continuous struggle; it requires the determination to try again every day with the assistance of God's grace. St Francis of Sales points out that "one must have patience with everybody, but first with oneself."¹

There are a great many ways in which a Christian can live the virtue of patience. The first battleground should be in the area of one's own behavior. It is so easy to become disheartened by our defects. We need to exercise patience in our interior struggle based on our unshakable confidence in God's love for us.

If we are to overcome a character defect, it will not happen overnight. Our victory will ultimately be won by the cultivation of humility, of trusting confidence in God, of greater docility.

To be patient with oneself while uprooting unwholesome tendencies and defects in character implies both an unyielding approach, and an acceptance of the fact that one will often have to present oneself before God like “the servant who had no resources with which to pay” (Mt 18:23)—with humility, seeking grace anew.

On our way towards the Lord, we will have to suffer many defeats; many of these will be of no consequence, some will. But the atonement and contrition for these failures will bring us even closer to God. This sorrow and reparation for our sins and shortcomings are not useless moods of gloom; they are sorrow and tears born of love. Genuine sorrow is the heavy thought of not giving back as much love as our Lord deserves; it is the pain of returning evil for good to one who so much loves us. (F. Fernández Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 2, 28)

We have to exercise patience with regard to unexpected events that befall us and interfere with our plans: sickness, poverty, extreme heat or cold, the minor misfortunes of everyday existence such as crossed telephone lines, traffic jams, having forgotten something and left it at home, or an unexpected visitor.

These little trials can cause us to lose our peace. Yet this is where the Lord is waiting for us, right there in the ups and downs of ordinary life. This is the raw material of our sanctity. This is precisely where we must struggle to sanctify ourselves and to sanctify others. (F. Fernández Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 5, 94)

Just as the surface of a polished diamond is not scratched by, but resists the attack of, any other stone, patience withstands any adversity. Patience is a medicine; it heals all injuries. It is a shield; it protects against all attacks. No one can harm us if we persevere patiently in the inner battle against ourselves. (Bl. Humbert of Romans, *On Patience*)

Patience before an Unjust Accusation

You must be patient even before an unjust accusation. Say the truth, and deny your guilt; but don't be disturbed, and don't force them to accept your explanation.

God uses these occasions to purify you. And whoever does not accept this suffering is depriving himself of purification which alone makes us mature.

When you are justly accused of some fault you have committed, you must genuinely humble yourself, and confess that you deserve even more than the charge brought against you.

If the accusation is false, excuse yourself meekly, and deny your guilt, for you owe respect to truth, and to the edification of your neighbor.

If they continue to accuse you, after you have made your true and legitimate explanation, don't be disturbed, and don't force them to accept your explanation. You have fulfilled your duty with regard to truth, now you must do the same with regard to humility. In this way, you will not sin against the care you must have for your own good name, or against the concern you must have for peace, humility, and meekness of heart. (St Francis of Sales, *Introduction to Devout Life*, 3,3)

Our lives should be purer and brighter than the sun. Yet, if anyone speaks evil of us, we should not grieve at being defamed. We would grieve only if we were defamed with basis and reason.

If we live in sin, even if there is no one to speak evil of us, we will be the most wretched of men. On the other hand, if we apply ourselves to live the Christian virtues, even if the whole world speaks evil of us, at that very time we will be more enviable than anyone.

All those around us who choose to follow Jesus will not be scandalized by the calumny of the wicked; they will be attracted by our good life.

Even if our calumniators are beyond number, there is no trumpet so clear to proclaim our innocence as the evidence of our actions; there is no portrait so clear as our pure life.

If all these qualities are present in us; if we are meek, humble, and compassionate; if we are sowers of peace; if hearing reproaches, we do not answer back, but rather, rejoice; then we shall attract all those around us no less than miracles do. They will be kindly disposed toward us, even if they are wild beasts, demons, or what you will. (St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St Matthew's Gospel*, 15)

Do not be troubled if anyone speaks evil of you. If anyone criticizes you in public, esteem him. Because if you search into his conscience, you

shall see him applauding and admiring you; he sees you stand nobly, and internally he proclaims your triumph and crowns you.

When the devil sees you fighting with this patience, he sees himself getting nothing. He, then, goes away because he fears to be the very cause of your winning more crowns with your endurance.

Even if men continue arguing perversely against you, you shall have from God the greater praise and admiration. (St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St Matthew's Gospel*, 15)

Once again ... they've been talking, they've written—in favor, against; with good, and with not so good will; insinuations and slanders, panegyrics and plaudits; hits and misses....

Fool, big fool! Why care about the clamor of the wind or the chirping of the cricket, or the bellowing, or the grunting, or the neighing? Keep going straight toward your target—head and heart intoxicated with God.

Besides, it's inevitable; don't try to install doors in open air. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 688)

Insults and slander are better cured by ignoring and despising them than by resenting them, complaining about them, and taking revenge for them. Whoever despises calumnies, makes them disappear; whoever gets offended with them, seemingly renders them true. It seems that the crocodiles attack only those who afraid of them; slander hurts only those who resent it. (St Francis de Sales, *Introduction to Devout Life*, 3,7)

Tongues have been wagging, and you've suffered rebuffs that hurt you, and all the more because you were not expecting them.

Your supernatural reaction should be to pardon—and even to ask for pardon!—and to take advantage of the experience to detach yourself from creatures. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 689)

When we face seemingly unjust accusations, we should examine our behavior, in God's presence, calmly and cheerfully—*cum gaudio et pace*; and we should change our ways if charity bids us, even if our actions were harmless.

We have to struggle to be saints, more and more each day. Then let people say what they like so long as we can apply the words of the

beatitude to their utterances: Blessed are you when they slander you for my sake—*Beati estis cum ... dixerint omne malum adversus vos mentientes propter me.* (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, 795)

Patience under Contempt

Why does God send us so many trials? Is he happy seeing us distressed, criticized, and persecuted? Is he a tyrant?

—No. God is not a tyrant.

God allows us to suffer because by suffering here, we are released from the torments due for our sins. Besides, these difficulties detach us from inordinate sensual pleasure and prepare our way to heaven.

By accepting pain we offer Him a token of our love. In a soul in love with God, tribulations and contempt become instruments of closer union with Him.

We must practice patience and show our love to God by calmly submitting to contempt.

As soon as a soul gives himself up to God, he sends him insults and persecution. One day an angel appeared to the Blessed Henry Suso and said to him, “Henry, you have so far mortified yourself in your own way; from now on you shall be mortified as others may wish.” The following day, as he was looking from a window on the street, he saw a dog shaking and tearing a rag that it held in its mouth. At the same moment a voice said to him, “So will you be torn in the mouths of men.” At once the Blessed Henry went to the street and secured the rag, wearing it on to encourage him in his coming trials.²

Affronts and injuries were the delicacies the saints earnestly longed and sought for. For thirty years, St Philip Neri had to put up with much ill-treatment in the old house of St Jerome at Rome [now St Jerome alla Carità]. But for this reason he refused to leave it, and resisted all the invitations of his spiritual sons to come and live with them in the new Oratory [Santa Maria in Vallicella], founded by himself, till he received an express command from the Pope to do so.

St John of the Cross was prescribed a change of air for an illness which eventually carried him to the grave. He could have selected a more commodious convent, of which the Prior was particularly attached to him. But he chose instead a poor convent, whose Prior was his enemy, and who, in fact, for a long time, and almost up to his last day, spoke ill of him and

abused him in many ways, and even prohibited the other monks from visiting him. Here we see how the saints even sought to be despised.

St Teresa wrote this admirable maxim: “Whoever aspires to perfection must never say: ‘They had no reason to treat me so.’ If you will not bear any cross but only those that you may find *reasonable*, then you are not seeking sanctity.”

While St Peter Martyr was complaining in prison of being confined unjustly, he received that celebrated answer from the crucified Lord, “And what evil have I done, to suffer and die on this Cross for men?” Oh, what consolation do the saints derive in all their tribulations from the ignominies which Jesus Christ endured!

St Eleazar, on being asked by his wife how he bore with so much patience the many injuries which he had to endure, and that even from his own servants, he replied: “I turn my eyes to the outraged Jesus, and I discover immediately that my affronts are nothing in comparison with what he suffered for my sake. Thus, God gives me strength to endure all patiently.”

Affronts, poverty, torments, and all tribulations separate further from God the soul that does not love him. On a soul in love with God, they become an instrument of closer union and more ardent love of God. “Many waters cannot quench charity” (Song 8:7). However great and grievous troubles may be, so far from extinguishing the flames of charity, they only serve to enkindle them the more in a soul that loves nothing else but God. (St Alphonsus M. de’ Liguori, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, 10, 3)

Why does Almighty God load us with so many crosses, and take pleasure in seeing us afflicted, reviled, persecuted, and ill-treated by the world? Is he, perchance, a tyrant, whose cruel disposition makes him rejoice in our suffering? No. God is by no means a tyrant, nor cruel. He is all compassion and love towards us; suffice it to say, that he has died for us. He indeed does rejoice at our suffering.

When a mother would wean her child, she puts gall on the breast, to create a distaste in the child. God rejoices in our suffering for our good. By suffering here, we are released from the torments due for our sins. These hardships detach us from the sensual pleasures of this world. God rejoices in them, because we give him, by our patience and resignation a token of our love. He rejoices in them, because they contribute to our increase of

glory in heaven. Such are the reasons for which the Almighty, in his compassion and love towards us, is pleased at our suffering. (St Alphonsus M. de' Liguori, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, 10, 3)

To practice patience we must be fully persuaded that every trial comes from the hands of God, either directly, or indirectly through men. We must therefore give thanks to God whenever we are beset with sorrows. We must accept, with gladness of heart, every event, prosperous or adverse, that proceeds from him, knowing that all happens by his disposition for our welfare: "To them that love God all things work together unto good" (Rom 8:28).

It is fitting in our tribulations to glance a moment at hell which we have deserved. All the pains of this life are incomparably smaller than the awful pains of hell. But above all, prayer, by which we gain the divine assistance, is the great means to suffer patiently all affliction, scorn, and contradictions. Prayer will furnish us with the strength we lack. The saints were persuaded of this; they recommended themselves to God, and so overcame every kind of torments and persecutions. (St Alphonsus M. de' Liguori, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, 10, 3)

Affections and Prayers

O Lord, I am fully persuaded that without suffering, and suffering with patience, I cannot win the crown of Paradise. David said: "From Him is my patience" (Ps 61:6). My patience in suffering must come from you. I often resolve to accept in peace all tribulations. But as soon as trials come, I grow sad and alarmed. If I suffer, I suffer without merit and without love, because I do not know how to suffer them so as to please you.

O my Jesus, through the merits of your patience in bearing so many afflictions for love of me, grant me the grace to bear crosses for the love of you! I love you with my whole heart, O my dear Redeemer! I love you, my sovereign good! I love you, my own love, worthy of infinite love. I am sorry for any displeasure I have ever caused you, more than for any evil whatever. I promise you I will receive with patience all the trials you may send me. But I look to you for help to be faithful to my promise, and especially to bear in peace the throes of my last agony and death.

O Mary, my Queen, obtain for me a true resignation in all the anguish and trials that await me in life and death. Amen. (St Alphonsus M. de'

Liguori, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, 10, 3)

When you meet with suffering, contempt..., the Cross, you should consider: What is this compared to what I deserve? (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 690)

We must patiently endure the tribulations of this life—ill-health, sorrows, poverty, losses, bereavement of kindred, affronts, persecutions, and all that is disagreeable. Let us invariably look on the trials of this world as signs of God's love towards us, and of his desire to save us in the world to come. And let us, moreover, be fully persuaded that the involuntary mortifications which God himself sends us are far more pleasing to him than those which are the fruit of our own choice.

In sickness let us resign ourselves entirely to the will of God; no devout exercise is more acceptable to him than this. If at such times we are unable to meditate, let us fix our eyes on our crucified Lord, and offer him our sufferings in union with all that he endured for us upon the Cross.

And when we are told that we are about to die, let us accept the tidings with calm and in the spirit of sacrifice; that is, with the desire to die, to give pleasure to Jesus Christ. This same desire gave all the merit to the death of the martyrs. We should then say, "O Lord, look at me here with no other will but your own blessed will." I am willing to suffer as much as you wish. I wish to die whenever you wish. We should not then wish to have our life prolonged to do penance for our sins; to accept death with perfect resignation outweighs all other penance.

We must likewise practice conformity to the will of God in bearing poverty and the various inconveniences that accompany it: cold, hunger, fatigue, contempt, and scorn.

We should accept losses, whether of property or of relatives and friends. Let us acquire the good habit of saying in every adversity: God has wanted it, so I want it. And at the death of our relatives, instead of wasting time in fruitless tears, let us employ it in praying for their souls; and offer to Jesus Christ, in their behalf, the pain of our bereavement.

Let us, moreover, force ourselves to endure scorn and insult with patience and serenity. Let us answer terms of outrage and insult with words of gentleness. As long as we feel disturbed, we should keep silence, till the mind grows tranquil. Meanwhile let us not be fretfully speaking to others of

the affront we have received, but in silence offer it to Jesus Christ, who endured so much for us. (St Alphonsus M. de' Liguori, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, 10, 3)

Patience in Sickness

It is essential to know how to suffer calmly and without excessive self-pity. God may send us a sickness; we must use the appropriate medical means, and, at the same time, realize that he is enticing us to endure it.

We must have patience not merely at being ill, but at having the illness that God wishes, where he wishes, among the people he wishes, and with whatever difficulties he wishes.

When you are sick, offer up all your pain and inconvenience; look at them as a service to our Lord, and join them to his torments on the Cross.

Obey your physician, take your medicine, diet, and other remedies out of love of God, remembering the gall he drank out of love of you.

Desire to get well to be able to serve God well, but do not refuse to lie ill. Obey God and prepare yourself for death, if it is God's Will, so that you may be happy with him forever. (St Francis of Sales, *Introduction to Devout Life*, 3,3)

Bodily sicknesses, when borne with patience, merit for us a beautiful crown.

St Vincent de Paul said: "If we knew what a precious treasure is contained in sicknesses, we would accept them with joy as the greatest possible blessings." The saint himself, constantly afflicted with ailments that often left him no rest day or night, bore them with so much peace and such serenity of countenance that no one could guess that he had any sickness at all. How edifying is it to see a sick person bear his illness with a peaceful countenance, as did St Francis de Sales! When he was ill, he simply explained his complaint to the physician, obeyed him exactly by taking the prescribed medicines, however nauseous; and for the rest he remained at peace, never uttering a single complaint in all his sufferings.

What a contrast with the conduct of those who do nothing but complain even for the most trifling indisposition, and who would like to have around them all their relatives and friends to sympathize with them! Far different was the instruction of St Teresa to her nuns: "My sisters, learn to suffer anything for the love of Jesus Christ, without letting all the world

know of it.”³ (St Alphonsus M. de’ Liguori, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, 10, 1)

My friend, do not think of what you would do if you were well, but be content to remain ill as long as God thinks fit. If you seek the will of God, what does it matter whether you are well or sick? (Ven. John of Avila, *Ep.* 54)

You say you are unable even to pray, because your head is aching. Be it so: you cannot meditate; but can’t you make acts of resignation to the will of God? If you make these acts, you will make a better prayer, welcoming with love all the torments that may assail you. So did St Vincent of Paul: when attacked by a serious illness, he kept himself tranquil in the presence of God, without forcing his mind to dwell on any particular subject. His sole exercise from time to time was to elicit some short acts of love, of confidence, of thanksgiving, and, more frequently, of resignation, especially in the crisis of his sufferings.

You cannot say prayers; and what more exquisite prayer than to cast a look from time to time on your crucified Lord, and offer him your pains, uniting the little that you endure to the overwhelming torments that afflicted Jesus on the Cross! (St Alphonsus M. de’ Liguori, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, 10, 1)

There was a certain pious lady lying bedridden with many disorders. She told a servant who was putting the crucifix into her hand, and telling her to pray to God to deliver her from her miseries: “But how can you ask me to get rid of the Cross, while I hold in my hand a God crucified? God forbid that I should do so. I will suffer for him who chose to suffer torments for me incomparably greater than mine.”

In like manner, St Joseph of Leonessa, a Capuchin, when the surgeon was about to amputate his arm, and his brethren would have bound him, to prevent him from stirring through vehemence of pain, seized a crucifix and exclaimed: “Why binding me? I do not need to be bound. Look who binds me to endure every suffering patiently for love of him.” And he bore the operation without a murmur. (St Alphonsus M. de’ Liguori, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, 10, 1)

Above all, in time of sickness we should be ready to accept death, and whatever death which God pleases. We must die; our life must finish in our last illness; and we do not know which will be our last illness. Thus, in every illness we must be prepared to accept the death that God has appointed for us. A sick person says: “Yes; but I have committed many sins, and have done no penance. I would like to live, not for the sake of living, but to make some satisfaction to God before my death.” But tell me, my brother, how do you know that if you live longer you will do penance, and not rather do worse than before? At present you can well cherish the hope that God has pardoned you; what penance can be more satisfactory than to accept death with resignation, if God so wills it?

Besides, unless death opens us the door, we cannot enter that blessed abode of love. This caused St Augustine, that loving soul, to cry out: “Oh, let me die, Lord, that I may see you!”—*Eia, Domine! moriar, ut te videam.*⁴ Lord, let me die, otherwise I cannot behold and love you face to face. (St Alphonsus M. de’ Liguori, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, 10, 1)

Patience in Trials and Difficult Situations

St Thomas tells us that patience is chiefly about sorrow. As a habit, the patient man remains serene when he faces an evil—especially an evil inflicted by others; he behaves in an exemplary manner, enduring circumstances which hurt him, here and now; moreover, he does not become saddened by these trials. The core of this virtue is the strength to control the natural anxiety or sadness when one faces failure or hardship. Left uncontrolled, that anxiety would lead a man to rebel against God or to abandon the struggle.

We must be patient also in those difficult situations not caused by ourselves or by those around us: sickness, poverty, extreme heat or cold, and the varied obstacles that can arise over the course of a day. All those situations could take away our peace of mind, and make us sullen and ill-humored, even with those who are blameless.

A supernatural outlook, to see the hand of God’s providence in all things, will give us peace and serenity. This manifestation of faith will allow us to “rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that such sufferings produce patience—a proven virtue—and patience, hope. And hope will not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Rom 5:3-5).

Patience will also lead us to tolerate certain evils in order to avoid greater ones. We should always remember that God permits evil in view of a superior good which we often do not see yet, but which shines forth on the last day under the light of eternity.

We must remember that God always hears our prayer. Nothing of what we do for him is lost. Like a good father, he will help us when he sees us seriously doing our best. For our part we must stretch our hand and grasp God's hand, his grace. Difficulties endured for love of God are always a source of fecundity.

Patience in suffering is the most useful means to arrive at a perfect obedience to God's Will. "My son," Solomon says, "do not reject the correction from the Lord, and do not faint when you are chastised by him; for the Lord chastises the man he loves, as a father checks a well-loved son" (Prov 3:11-12).

These words are developed at considerable length in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!" (Heb 12:7-9)

Sometimes God allows tribulation to fall upon us. He does not enjoy our suffering, but he permits it to draw us to himself. When we turn to him, he does away with any fear or pain. If we were alike in tribulation and at ease, there would not be need of temptations.

Even the great saints learned the virtue of patience from their trials, as the psalm acknowledges: "It is good for me that you have humbled me" (Ps 119:71). Even the Lord said to the apostles: "In the world you shall have tribulation" (Jn 16:33).

St Paul admitted the same thing: "There was given to me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to beat me and stop me from getting too proud!" (2 Cor 12:7). He was not freed from having temptations, when he wanted so, because of the great blessing deriving from the struggle.

By tribulations and temptations the patriarchs won their crowns and their names were listed in glory.

Thus, as the wise saying goes, “Do not become alarmed when disaster comes” (Qo 2:2), but learn only one thing, to bear all with patience and without complaint. It belongs to God to decide when to stop our tribulations; he permits them to occur. It belongs to us to bear them patiently, with a good disposition; if we do so, all blessings will follow. But to obtain these blessings, grow in sanctity, and gain glory we must accept whatever falls upon us, thanking God. He knows better than we what is good for us; he loves us more than our own parents.

May these considerations be for us like a talisman to get rid of any fear, despair, or impatience. May we praise God always who ordered all the best to happen to us. (St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St Matthew's Gospel*, 10, 8)

St Augustine emphasized that a Christian should be ready to endure hardships to attain everlasting happiness.

“For I am ready for scourges” (Ps 38:18 Vulg.). These words are uttered most solemnly, as if saying: “For this I was born, to suffer scourges.” All of us, Adam’s children, inevitably deserve scourging. But sometimes great sinners are not punished wholly in this life or in correspondence with their deeds, because their behavior is already beyond hope of improvement.

But those who hope to reach life everlasting must of necessity be afflicted in this world, according to these words: “My son, reject not the correction of the Lord, and do not faint when you are chastised by Him” (Prov 3:11). “For the one whom the Lord loves he chastises, and he scourges every son whom he receives” (Heb 12:5).

Thus, my enemies need not cast insults, nor boast in triumph. Even if my Father chastises me, I am ready for scourges, because my inheritance awaits me. If I do not bear correction, I will not receive the inheritance, for chastisement is the lot of every son. So true is this that the Father did not spare even him who had no sin.” (St Augustine, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 37.18)

St Augustine further stressed the role of suffering as testing-ground and correction when he reflected on the difficulties suffered in the sack of Rome in the year 410.

Many who have emerged unscathed now speak calumny against these Christian times. They saddle Christ with the evils which Rome has suffered, and do not credit him with the blessings which enabled them to live as witnesses of his glory. They ascribe these blessings to their own fate.

If they were right-thinking, they would attribute to divine Providence everything, also their fortitude to resist the harsh and grim treatment that they experienced from the enemy. Providence uses wars to afflict and correct the debased conduct of men, and likewise to test holy and praiseworthy lives. When they have been tested, God transports these holy people to a better life, or keeps them for other purposes longer on this earth. (St Augustine, *The City of God*, 1.1 ff)

Someone will ask: “Why does God’s mercy extend even to the wicked and ungrateful?” The only evidence we have is that he who dispenses it “makes his sun rise on good and bad, and rains on just and unjust” (Mt 5:45). Some sinners ponder on this, repent, and amend their wickedness. But some, as Paul says, “despise the riches of God’s goodness and long-suffering, because of the hardness of their hearts and their unrepentant souls.” They lay up for themselves “wrath on the day of anger, on the day of the revelation of the righteous judgement of God, who will render to every man according to his works” (Rom 2:4-6).

God’s patience entices the wicked to repent, and his scourge prompts good men to have patience. Likewise God’s mercy embraces the good, and they will be loved; his harshness arraigns the wicked for future punishment. For divine Providence has ordained for the just the future treasure of blessings which the unjust will not enjoy; and for the wicked, sufferings which will not torture the good. God has also decided that the good and evil things of this transient world should be shared by both, the good and the bad. Thus, we will not seek too eagerly the good things possessed by the wicked, and we will not shamefully avoid the evils that good men often have to endure. (St Augustine, *The City of God*, 1.1 ff)

Now give some thought to this. Do faithful and holy people suffer any evil which does not redound to their good? Surely not, unless we are to regard as idle the thought of St Paul when he says: “We know that to them that love God all things work together for good”—*omnia in bonum*. (Rom 8:28). (St Augustine, *The City of God*, 1.1 ff)

Those who criticized God's Providence lost everything they had. They lost their faith, their supernatural outlook, and the blessings of a pious man who is rich in God's eyes. That is the wealth that Christians have; that was the source of Paul's wealth when he said: "Piety with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Tim 6:6-10).

Some lost their material wealth in the sack of Rome. If only they had possessed it as recommended by Paul—who was outwardly poor but rich within, if only they had regarded wealth as if they did not regard it, they could have uttered the words of Job, sorely tested but wholly unconquered: "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, naked shall I return to earth. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. As it has pleased the Lord, so it is done. Blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). (St Augustine, *The City of God*, 1.1 ff)

You say that the enemy has tortured some good men, even Christians, to make them reveal the hiding place of their goods. But these Christians did not betray or lose the Good by which they were themselves good. If they preferred torture to betraying the mammon of iniquity, they were not good. They should not have endured as much for gold as for Christ. They should have been advised to love Christ, who can enrich with eternal blessedness those who suffer for his sake, rather than gold and silver. To suffer on behalf of these things is indeed wretchedness, whether lies keep their riches successfully hidden or telling the truth surrenders them. During this torture no person lost Christ by confessing him, and no one kept his gold except by denying that he had any. Before, the material goods inflicted tortures on their owners without beneficial reward for loving them; now, the tortures taught them to love the imperishable good. (St Augustine, *The City of God*, 1.1 ff)

True, there were some with nothing to reveal who were disbelieved and tortured. Perhaps they were too keen to have wealth; they were not poor by their own will, and so it had to be shown that it is not wealth itself but the desire for it that deserves such torture.

But some others had no gold or silver hidden away; they had planned a better–holier–life (I am not sure whether any such people were tortured because they were thought to have wealth), at any rate, those who during such torture confessed a holy poverty, thereby, confessed Christ. So even if they were not believed by the enemy, such confessors of holy poverty won a heavenly award by being tortured. (St Augustine, *The City of God*, 1.1 ff)

They also say that the long period of hunger ravaged many Christians. The good and faithful turned this to their advantage by enduring it with devotion. Those whom the famine killed were taken from the evils of this life as if by a physical illness. Those who survived learned to live more economically, and fast more extensively.

But, you say, many Christians were killed, destroyed in a foul assortment of numerous casualties. We certainly resent this, but we do, at any rate, accept it as the common lot of all born into this life. Of this I am sure, that no person ever died who would not have died at some time in the future. The end of life brings the same result after a long life as in a short one. (St Augustine, *The City of God*, 1.1 ff)

St John of Damascus (c. 675-749) is one of the most celebrated Greek theologians. In reflecting on the role of Providence, St John first insists that we must accept what befalls us without complaint, accepting it as the higher judgement of God. But he then offers a series of explanations why the just man may be permitted to suffer: the virtue which is evinced in such suffering may be beneficial in various ways both to the sufferer himself and to the onlookers who witness it.

Providence is God's care for things that exist; again, Providence is God's will, through which all existing things obtain adequate guidance. If Providence is God's will, it is inevitable that everything that happens through Providence must logically happen in the most beautiful and divinely appropriate way, and could not come to pass in a better manner. For the Creator of things is the same provident God who governs them. It is not fitting or logical that there should be a creator and a different provider.

In such case both would be utterly defective, one in creating and the other in making provision. So God is both Creator and Provider; his power of creating, maintaining, and governing is his good will. "All that the Lord pleased, he has done, in heaven and on earth" (Ps 134:6), and none has resisted his will (cf. Rom 9:19). He willed that all things be made, and they were made. He wills the world to remain, and it does remain. All that he wills comes to pass.

We can most correctly assess that God is provident, that he supplies and governs the world according to his admirable plans. God alone is by nature good and wise. Being *good*, he cares for the world, maintains and governs it; one who does not care is not good. Even men and creatures without intelligence naturally provide for their own offspring; he who does not, is reproached. And being *wise*, God looks after things in the best possible way.

Bearing these facts in mind, we must admire, praise, and accept without demur *all* the works of the Providence, even if they seem unjust to many. God's providence cannot be fully known or understood; our thoughts and deeds, and what is to come, are known to him alone. But when I say we must admire *all*, I mean what is not in our control; for what is at our discretion does not stay within Providence but within our own free will. (St John of Damascus, *The Orthodox Faith*, 2.29)

Some things happen with God's approval, some by his permission. All that is incontrovertibly good happens with his approval. God does not want disasters *by themselves*; these are permitted to happen to fulfil God's plans. Often, God allows negative things to happen so that someone may reveal to other men the virtue he has received from God; this happened in the case of Job. On other occasions he permits something outrageous to be done, so that through the apparently outrageous act some great and wonderful success can be achieved, like the salvation of men through the cross. In yet another variation he allows a holy man to suffer harshly, so that he may not forsake his right conscience, or become proud as the result of the power and grace allotted to him, as in the case of Paul (cf. 2 Cor 12:7).

A man is seen deserted by God for a time to put another to rights, so that when others consider his position they may learn a lesson. Lazarus and the rich man are a case in point (cf. Lk 16:19ff.). When we see people suffer, our nature becomes aware of its limitations, and we become humble.

A person may seem ignored by God also for another's glory, rather than because of his or his parent's sins. For example, the man blind from birth, for the glory of the Son of man (cf. John 9:3).

Again, a man is permitted to suffer to arouse the emulation of another, so that when the victim's glory is commended, the rest may embrace suffering in the hope of glory to come and in eager anticipation of future blessings, as the martyrs did.

A man is permitted to fall into evil ways sometimes to straighten out some worse vice. For example, a man may become proud of his virtues and achievements, and God allows him to fall into fornication, so that by his stumbling he may attain awareness of his weakness. After being humbled, he may draw close and make confession to the Lord." (St John of Damascus, *The Orthodox Faith*, 2.29)

John Chrysostom left behind him a reflection on false and true assessments of what constitutes real harm and real deprivation. He argues that the loss of material possessions constitute no real loss, and adduces Job as the living example of this.

Many of the more wretched and foolish among us observe the just man being hauled about, lacerated, throttled, while the man who is a swindler, dishonorable, dishonestly rich, or powerful is feared by the common folk and inflicts on just people injuries beyond counting. This happens indifferently in cities, countryside, and desert; it happens on land and sea. Those who observe this are gripped by a curious madness, and they disparage God's providence. This letter of mine shall take this issue and that attitude; the fight in this new and unusual engagement will be useful, and profitable for those willing to listen and be persuaded. I will try to show that none of those who suffer wrong do so at the hands of another, but at their own hands.

To make my words clearer, let us first ask ourselves, what is injustice? What is a person's proper quality, and what injures it? What seems to injure it, but in fact does not?

Every object has something that injures it; iron suffers rust, wool suffers moths, flocks of sheep suffer wolves.... Our bodies suffer fever, paralysis, and swarms of other sicknesses. So everything has something which harms its excellence.

Let us examine what is really the scourge of the human race, and what afflicts man's true quality. Most people have erroneous ideas; they suggest different causes for what really damages human excellence. Some suggest poverty, other physical sickness, others financial loss, others slander or shame, and others death. They keep on lamenting and bewailing these things, and pitying those who suffer them.

They weep and are aghast, and say to each other: "What sufferings so-and-so has to put up with. He has been stripped of all he had!" A friend speaks of someone else: "What's-his-name has been struck down by a terrible illness; he is given up by the doctors attending him." One man grieves and is sorry for people in prison, another for those expelled from their native land and forced to live abroad, another for those who have lost their freedom, another for those imprisoned in the hands of enemies, another for those drowned or burnt, another for a man who has been buried under the debris of his house. But nobody grieves for those who live wicked lives. And—what is more tragic—they often regard such men as happy. This attitude is the cause of all our problems.

None of the experiences mentioned harms the man of wisdom; none can diminish his virtue. When a man loses all his property, or is robbed by swindlers, robbers, or dishonest slaves, how does this loss affect his human dignity? But, first, in what does this human dignity consist? Not in riches, that makes some fear poverty. Not in health, that makes some tremble at illness. Not in the opinion of the crowd, that makes some fear a bad reputation. Not in long and healthy life, that makes some have apprehension of death. Not in freedom, that makes some dread slavery. Human dignity lies in the keen possession of true beliefs, and in right living according to these beliefs. The devil himself will not be able to pillage these possessions if the person who has acquired them guards them with appropriate care.

The devil who is most wicked and fierce is aware of this. He destroyed the possessions of Job, not to make Job poor, but to force him to utter some blasphemous word. He afflicted Job's body, not merely to oppress him with sickness, but to lay low the excellence of his soul. He put into action all his devices. He made Job poor from being rich. And, what seems to everyone the most terrible fate, he made him childless after he had had many children. He lacerated Job's whole body more savagely than the public executioners do—their nails do not tear the flesh of those who fall into their hands as much as the worms nibbled and wasted Job's body. The devil

caused him to incur an evil reputation; Job's friends came up to him and said: "You have not been afflicted as much as your faults deserved." He not only had Job expelled from his home and city, and transferred to another place; he gave him a dung heap as his home and city.

Yet, in spite of all, the devil did not harm Job's dignity, but made him even more splendid through the plots which he laid against him. He failed to deprive him of any of his goods, in spite of the fact that he robbed him all these. He made his wealth of virtue greater, for subsequently Job enjoyed greater trust from God because he had fought a more taxing fight.

Job, who endured such pains, suffered no wrong. He suffered at the hands, not of a man, but of the devil, who is more wicked than all men, and remained patient. Who can then support people who say: "Such-and-such wronged and harmed me"? The devil, embodying such wickedness, set in motion all his instruments, hurled all his weapons, and all that men account as evils, emptying them upon the just man's house and person. Yet he did not destroy Job's dignity, but rather helped him. How, then, can people accuse and hate particular individuals because they have suffered at their hands? (St John Chrysostom, *No One Is Harmed*)

The holier one is, the more earthly suffering one has to endure. Just as the soul weakens its desire for worldly things, so increases the number of trials coming from them. Thus, you see many seeking sanctity who sweat under the heavy burden of the trials they face. But, as our Lord says, these holy ones yield their fruit through the use of patience; by accepting such trials with humility, they are given access to the eternal peace of heaven.

This is how the grape is crushed and liquefied, acquiring the taste of wine; this is how the olive, milled and pressed, abandons its dregs, becoming the purest oil; this is how the grain is parted from the straw, by means of the thresher, and thus cleansed, is carried to the granary. (St Gregory the Great, *Hom. 15 On the Gospels*)

Remain firm, like the anvil under the hammer. A good athlete must receive blows in order to win the fight. So too must we endure everything for God, so that he in turn may bear with us. (St Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to Polycarp*, 3)

How heroic it is to remain standing, unbent among the numerous wreckages of mankind; undefeated, unlike those who lack hope in God. How noble to rejoice instead, and seize the opportunity placed within our reach, to grasp the prize for our fidelity and deeds, from the hand of the divine Judge. We will be able to do so through patience in our struggle, by giving proof of the fortitude of our faith, and by following the narrow path leading to Christ. (St Cyprian, *On Mortality*, 14)

Public events have led you to prefer a voluntary confinement, which is worse perhaps, because of the circumstances, than the confinement of a prison.

You've suffered an eclipse of your personality.

On all sides you feel yourself hemmed in: selfishness, curiosity, misunderstanding, gossip. Well, so what? Have you forgotten your very free will and that power of yours as a "child"? The absence of leaves and flowers (of external action) does not exclude the growth and activity of the roots (interior life).

Work; the trend of the events will change, and you'll yield more fruit than before—and it will be more savory. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 697)

Are you suffering some great affliction? Do you meet adversity? Say very slowly, as if savoring the words, this powerful and manly prayer:

"May the most just and most lovable Will of God be done, be fulfilled, be praised, and eternally exalted above all things. Amen. Amen."

I assure you that you'll find peace. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 691)

Life presents us with all sorts of problems and trials. Some are great and many are of little consequence. With the help of God's grace the soul can be strengthened by every trial.

Certain trials emanate from other people, such as direct attacks or veiled threats from people who do not understand our vocation, or perhaps public opposition from a pagan culture, or from declared enemies of the Church.

Other trials have their origin in the limitations of our human nature. We may experience financial difficulties or grave family problems. At times

we will become sick or exhausted or completely discouraged.

If we are to persevere in adversity, we need to exercise patience. We should be cheerful no matter what develops, because we have our eyes fixed on Christ. He has encouraged us to move forward, to live in his peace. Our confidence should be anchored in the fact that Christ has triumphed. (F. Fernández Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 5, 94)

Sharers in the Suffering of Christ

Suffering is the lot of the children of God, and a sign of predestination; and a Christian must accept suffering. "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Act 14:21). Christian patience is patterned after the model of Christ patient on the Cross; it surpasses all human calculation.

Out of love for us, Christ endured the most severe physical, psychological, and moral sufferings. These blows came from the rage of the priests of the synagogue, from the abandonment of his people, from the ingratitude of his own, from the curse of sin, which he took upon himself as a voluntary victim. If we suffer with him, we will be glorified with him.

We must be patient and suffer for the following motives:

- to accompany Jesus in his suffering,
- to atone for our sins,
- to atone for the sins of all mankind, and, also,
- for our own purification and increase of merit.

Thus, we know why we must suffer; why euthanasia—or mercy killing—is wrong. Some dying persons are reconciled to God only at the last moment by their patience in bearing the agony.

THE BELOVED: My son, I came down from Heaven to save you. I took your sorrows upon me. I had no need to do so, but my love for you drew me on. I wanted you to learn the lesson of patience, of bearing the sorrows of life without bitterness or resentment. From the hour of my birth until my death on the Cross, there was never a moment without sorrows to bear. My worldly goods amounted to very little. Many and frequent were the complaints I heard people make about me. When they shamed and insulted me, I took it gently. My kindness was repaid with ingratitude, my miracles with blasphemy, my teachings with rejection.

THE LEARNER: Lord, during your life you were patient, thereby fulfilling to the utmost the will of your Father. It is only right, then, that I, a mere wretched sinner, endure things patiently, in accordance with your will. And to save my soul, I should shoulder, for as long as you will, the load of this corruptible life. I feel the weight of this present life; yet through your grace it has become the source of great merit. Your own example, and the steps your saints have trodden, have made it easier for the weak to endure, and greater in glory. It is a life much richer in consolation than it was in former times, under the Old Law. Then the gate of Heaven stayed shut, and even the road to it seemed unsure, since there were so few at that time who cared to look for the kingdom of Heaven. And even the holy men of those days, those due to be saved, could not enter the kingdom of Heaven until you had paid their debt for them with your passion and your holy death.

What a debt of gratitude I owe you, for your mercy in showing me, along with all your faithful followers, the straight and true road that leads to your eternal kingdom! That road we must follow is your own life. By holy patience we make our way towards you, you who are to crown our journey. Had you not gone before and shown us the way, which of us would care to follow it? Many, I fear, would stay behind, remain at a distance, if they had not your own wondrous example to gaze at. Why, even now, for all the times we have heard of your teaching and all your miracles, the flame within us burns low. What would happen if we lacked that great glow of light to guide us in following you? (T. a Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*, 3, ch. 18)

There are many—including Christians—who act as if they were enemies of the Cross of Christ. There are many for whom the preaching of the Cross seems foolishness. There are many who flee from the Cross as from the devil; for whom the word “mortification” is unintelligible; for whom penance is something that belongs to the narrow and superstitious mentality of the past. These people generally have suffocated their sense of sin and responsibility, if they have not lost it altogether. They are monumentally ignorant of Christianity itself. They lack any brotherhood whatsoever with Christ, the “First of the brethren,” the Head of the Body, to which as Christians they belong. (F. Suárez, *Mary of Nazareth*)

During our Lord's passion and death, his Mother could have taken refuge in the sympathetic company of the women, in the intimacy of her home, far away from Calvary. After all, there was nothing she could do, and her presence neither avoided nor relieved the sufferings and humiliation of her Son.

But she was there, nevertheless. She did stay with Christ for the same reason as any mother stays beside the deathbed of her son, instead of going out to try to enjoy herself when she sees that she can neither keep him alive nor stop his suffering.

No, the Virgin Mary identified herself with her Son. Her love made her suffer with him since there was nothing else she could do. Because she loved him and because love unites, she suffered with him. Her love could not stand separation, not even in that terrible moment; she preferred suffering, however great it might be. (F. Suárez, *Mary of Nazareth*)

There is a precise and very direct relationship between the capacity to love and the capacity to suffer. He who is not capable of suffering, is incapable of loving. The reason why the saints have so eagerly embraced suffering is because their love for Christ led them to suffer with him. We do not embrace suffering, but, on the contrary, avoid it, because we still love ourselves too much. Every now and then we should examine our love of the Cross to gauge our love of God. We love God to the same measure that we love the Cross.

The Cross is the only way of uniting earth with heaven. If we reject it, we reject the means of our salvation. Thus, faithfulness to Christ on Calvary—acceptance of the Cross—is both, a sign that we are on the path to salvation, and a confirmation of God's love for us. (F. Suárez, *Mary of Nazareth*)

He who loves Jesus Christ loves sufferings.

He who loves God in suffering earns a double reward in paradise. St Vincent of Paul⁵ said that it was a great misfortune to be free from suffering in this life. And he added that a congregation or an individual that does not suffer, and is applauded by all the world, is not far from a fall.

If on a day St Francis of Assisi noticed that he had suffered nothing for God, he became afraid lest God had forgotten him. St John Chrysostom⁶ said that when God endows a man with the grace of suffering, he gives him

a greater grace than that of raising the dead to life. In performing miracles, man remains indebted to God; in suffering, God makes himself indebted to man. And he added,⁷ that whoever endures something for the love of God, even if he had no other gift than his patience, this will procure for him an immense reward. Thus, he affirmed, St Paul received a greater grace in being bound in chains for Jesus Christ, than in being taken to the third heaven in ecstasy. (St Alphonsus M. de' Liguori, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, 1, 2)

“Patience has to finish its perfect work” (Jas 1:4).

Nothing is more pleasing to God than to see a soul suffering with patience all the crosses coming to him. The effect of love is to liken the lover to the person loved. St Francis de Sales said, “All the wounds of Christ are so many tongues which tell us that we must suffer for him. The method of the saints is to suffer constantly for Jesus. In this way we, too, become saints.” A person who loves Jesus Christ is anxious to be treated like Jesus Christ—and he was poor, persecuted, and despised.

St John beheld all the saints “clothed in white, and with palms in their hands” (Apoc 7:9). The palm is the symbol of martyrs, and yet not all the saints suffered martyrdom. Why, then, do all the saints carried palms in their hands? St Gregory replied that all the saints have been martyrs either of the sword or of patience. And he added, “We can be martyrs without the sword, if we keep patience.”⁸ (St Alphonsus M. de' Liguori, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, 1, 2)

A soul who loves Jesus Christ gains merit by loving and by suffering. Hear what our Lord said to St Teresa: “Do you think, my child, that merit consists in consolations? No, it consists in suffering and in loving. Look at my life, wholly embittered with afflictions. Be assured, my child, that the more my Father loves any one, the more sufferings he sends him; suffering is the banner of his love. Look at my wounds; your torments will never reach so far. It is absurd to suppose that my Father favors with his friendship those who are strangers to suffering.”⁹

St Teresa made this consoling remark: “When God sends a trial, he at once rewards it with some favor.”¹⁰ One day Jesus Christ appeared to the blessed Baptista Varani,¹¹ and told her of three special favors that he bestows on highly esteemed souls: the first is, not to sin; the second, which

is greater, to perform good works; the third, and the greatest of all, to suffer for his love.

St Teresa¹² used to say that whenever anyone does something for God, the Almighty repays him with some trial. Thus, the saints, on receiving tribulations, thanked God for them. St Louis of France, referring to his captivity in Turkey, said: "I rejoice, and thank God more for the patience he gave me in the time of my imprisonment, than if he had made me master of the universe." St Elizabeth, princess of Thuringia, after her husband's death, was banished with her son from the kingdom. Homeless and abandoned by all, she went to a convent of the Franciscans, and there had the *Te Deum* sung in thanksgiving to God for being allowed to suffer for his love. (St Alphonsus M. de' Liguori, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, 1, 2)

St Joseph de Calasanz used to say, "All suffering is insignificant if we gain heaven." And the Apostle had already said the same: "The sufferings of this time are not worth comparing with the glory to come, that will be revealed in us" (Rom 8:18).

It would be a great gain for us to endure all the torments of all the martyrs during our whole lives, in order to enjoy one single second of the bliss of paradise. We should then willingly embrace our crosses, knowing that the sufferings of this temporary life will gain for us happiness everlasting. "For our light and troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Cor 4:17).

But whoever desires the crown of paradise must combat and suffer. "If we suffer, we shall also reign" (2 Tim 2:12). We cannot get a reward without merit; and to merit we must have patience: "He is not crowned, unless he strives according to the rules" (2 Tim 2:5). And the person who strives with the greatest patience shall have the greatest reward. Wonderful indeed! (St Alphonsus M. de' Liguori, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, 1, 2)

Concerning material goods, worldly people try to get as much as they can. But when it is a question of the goods of eternal life, they say, "It is enough if we get a little corner in heaven!" Such is not the language of the saints. They are not satisfied with anything of this life; they even strip themselves of all earthly goods. But concerning eternal goods, they strive to

obtain them in the greatest possible measure. I ask you, which of the two act with more wisdom and prudence?

But even in the present life, he who suffers with most patience enjoys the greatest peace. St Philip Neri¹³ used to say, “In this world there is no purgatory; it is either all paradise or all hell. He who patiently endures tribulations, enjoys a paradise; he who does not do so, suffers a hell. And St Teresa writes, “He who embraces the crosses sent him by God does not feel them.” St Francis de Sales, finding himself on one occasion beset on every side with tribulations, said, “For some time now severe opposition and hardships have befallen me. These afford me so sweet a peace, that nothing can equal it. They give me assurance that my soul will be firmly united with God; thus, they are the sole ambition, the sole desire of my heart.”¹⁴ (St Alphonsus M. de’ Liguori, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, 1, 2)

Peace can never be found by one who leads an irregular life, but only by one who lives in union with God and fulfills his blessed will. A certain missionary in the Indies was one day witnessing the execution of a person. Already on the scaffold, the criminal called the missionary and said, “You must know, Father, that I was once a member of your Order. I observed the rules and led a very happy life. But afterwards, I began to relax in the strict observance of them. I immediately experienced pain in everything; so much so, that I abandoned the religious life. I gave myself up to vice, which finally brought me here.” And in conclusion he said, “I tell you this, so that my example may be a warning to others.”

Let us be convinced that in this valley of tears true peace of heart cannot be found, except by him who endures and lovingly embraces sufferings to please Almighty God. This is the consequence of that corruption brought to us by sin. The saints on earth suffer and love; the saints in heaven enjoy and love.

In a letter that he wrote to one of his penitents, Father Paul Segneri encouraged her to suffer, and told her to keep these words inscribed at the foot of her crucifix: “This is the way to love.” A soul loves Jesus not simply by suffering, but by desiring to suffer for the love of him. “And what greater acquisition,” said St Teresa, “can we possibly make than to have a means to please Almighty God.”¹⁵ (St Alphonsus M. de’ Liguori, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, 1, 2)

How fast men get scared at the bare mention of crosses, humiliations, and afflictions! Nevertheless, there are many souls who suffer willingly and gladly; they would be quite disconsolate without suffering. “The sight of the Jesus crucified,” said a devout person, “renders the Cross so lovely to me, that it seems to me I could never be happy without suffering. The love of Jesus Christ is sufficient for me to do anything.” Listen how Jesus advises everyone who wants to follow him to take up and carry his Cross: “Let him take up his Cross, and follow me” (Lk 9:23). But we must take it up and carry it, not by coercion and against our will, but with humility, patience, and love. (St Alphonsus M. de’ Liguori, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, 1, 2)

One day St Gertrude asked our Lord what she could offer him most acceptable. And he replied, “My child, you can do nothing more gratifying to me than to submit patiently to all the tribulations that come your way.”

The Venerable Father John of Avila said, “One *Blessed be God* in contrarieties is worth more than a thousand thanksgivings in prosperity.” (St Alphonsus M. de’ Liguori, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, 1, 2)

A soul who loves God has no other end in view but to be wholly united with him. Learn from St Catharine of Genoa what is necessary to arrive at this perfect union: “To attain union with God, adversities are indispensable. By them God destroys all our corrupt inclinations within and without. All injuries, contempt, infirmities, abandonment of relatives and friends, confusions, temptations, and other mortifications, all are in the highest degree necessary for us to carry on the fight. After repeated victories we will come to extinguish within us all vicious movements, so that they are no longer felt. We shall never arrive at divine union until adversities, instead of seeming bitter to us, become all sweet for God’s sake.”

A soul who sincerely desires to belong to God must be resolved—St John of the Cross¹⁶ writes—not to seek enjoyments in this life, but to suffer in all things. She must embrace with eagerness all voluntary mortifications, and with still greater eagerness those that come without seeking them, since they are the more welcome to Almighty God.

“The patient man is better than the valiant” (Prov 14:32). God is pleased with a person who practices mortification by fasting, hair-cloths

and disciplines, because of the courage displayed in such mortifications. But he is much more pleased with those who have the courage to bear patiently and gladly the crosses that come from his own divine hand. St Francis de Sales said, “Such mortifications as come to us from the hand of God, or from men by his permission, are always more precious than those which are the offspring of our own will. For it is a general rule, that wherever there is less of our own choice, God is better pleased, and we ourselves derive greater profit.”¹⁷ St Teresa taught the same thing: “We gain more in one day by the contradictions sent to us from God or our neighbor than by ten years of self-inflicted mortifications.”¹⁸ (St Alphonsus M. de’ Liguori, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, 1, 2)

The Christian Meaning of Human Suffering

There is no human life without suffering. In the following paragraphs Pope John Paul II gives us the reasons why we must accept hardships. Suffering—a part of man’s nature—is necessary for his salvation.

St Paul declared the power of salvific suffering saying: “In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church” (Col 1:24).

These words seem to be found at the end of the long road that winds through suffering. This suffering forms part of the history of man and is illuminated by the Word of God. These words have as it were the value of a final discovery, which is accompanied by joy....

Even though St Paul wrote that “the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now” (Rom 8:22), even though man knows and is close to the sufferings of the animal world, nevertheless what we express by the word *suffering* seems to be particularly *essential to the nature of man*. It is as deep as man himself. (John Paul II, Enc. *Salvifici Doloris*, On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering, 11 February 1984, 1-2)

Redemption was accomplished *through the Cross of Christ*, that is, *through his suffering*.... And man becomes the way for the Church when suffering enters his life. This happens, as we know, at different moments in life, it takes place in different ways, it assumes different dimensions; nevertheless, in whatever form, suffering seems to be, and is, almost *inseparable from man’s earthly existence*. (John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 3)

Salvation means liberation from evil, and for this reason it is closely bound up with the problem of suffering. God gave his Son “to the world” to free man from evil. This liberation must be achieved by the only-begotten Son through his own suffering....

Thus, we find ourselves facing a new dimension, different from the one which envisions suffering only within the limits of justice. This is *the dimension of Redemption*....

The mission of the only-begotten Son is *to conquer sin and death*. He conquers sin by his obedience unto death, and he overcomes death by his Resurrection.

By his mission Christ strikes at evil at its very roots; not only evil and definitive suffering (so that man “should not perish, but have eternal life”), but also—at least indirectly— *evil and suffering in their temporal and historical dimension*. Jesus Christ conquered suffering by love. (John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 14-15)

Christ gives the answer to the question about suffering and the meaning of suffering.... The words: “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup pass from me. Yet, not as I will, but as you will” (Mt 26:39), and later: “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done” (Mt 26:42), have a manifold eloquence. They prove the truth of that love which the only-begotten Son gives to the Father in his obedience. At the same time, they attest the truth of suffering.

The words of that prayer of Christ in Gethsemani prove *the truth of love through the truth of suffering*. Christ’s words confirm in all simplicity this human truth of suffering, to its very depths: suffering is the undergoing of evil before which man shudders....

After the words in Gethsemani come the words uttered on Golgotha, words which bear witness to this depth—unique in the history of the world—of the evil of the suffering experienced. When Christ says: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”, his words are an expression of abandonment.... These words are born because the Father “laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Is 53:6). They also foreshadow the words of St Paul: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us” (2 Cor 5:21).... Human suffering has reached its culmination in the Passion of Christ. (John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 18)

The Redemption was accomplished through the suffering of Christ. The Redeemer suffered in place of man, for man. Every man has *his own share in the Redemption*. Each one is also *called to share in that suffering* through which the Redemption was accomplished. He is called to share in that suffering through which all human suffering has also been redeemed. In bringing about the Redemption through suffering, Christ has also *raised human suffering to the level of the Redemption*. Thus, each man, in his suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ. (John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 19)

The witnesses of Christ's Passion are at the same time the witnesses of his Resurrection.... To share in the sufferings of Christ is to suffer for the Kingdom of God. In the eyes of the just God, before his judgment, those who share in the suffering of Christ become worthy of this Kingdom. Through their suffering, in a certain sense they repay the infinite price of the Passion and death of Christ, which became the price of our Redemption....

Those who share in the sufferings of Christ are also called, through their own sufferings, to share *in glory*. (John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 21-22)

Suffering contains a special *call to the virtue* which man must exercise on his own part. And this is the virtue of perseverance in bearing whatever disturbs and causes harm. In doing this, the individual unleashes hope, which maintains in him the conviction that suffering will not get the better of him, that it will not deprive him of his dignity as a human being, a dignity linked to awareness of the meaning of life. And indeed this meaning makes itself known together with *the working of God's love*, which is the supreme gift of the Holy Spirit. The more he shares in this love, man rediscovers himself more and more fully in suffering; he rediscovers the "soul" which he thought he had "lost" because of suffering. (John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 23)

In the Letter to the Colossians we read the words which constitute as it were the final stage of the spiritual journey in relation to suffering: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh *I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions* for the sake of his body, that is, the Church"

(Col 1:24).... Those words bear witness to the exceptional union of Christ and man in the community of the Church. For, *whoever suffers in union with Christ*—just as the Apostle Paul bears his “tribulations” in union with Christ—not only receives from Christ strength but also “completes” by his suffering “what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions”....

Does this mean that the Redemption achieved by Christ is not complete? No. It only means that the Redemption, accomplished through satisfactory love, *remains always open to all love expressed in human suffering*.... Christ achieved the Redemption completely and to the very limit; but at the same time he did not bring it to a close.... Christ opened himself from the beginning to every human suffering and constantly does so. Yes, it seems to be part of *the very essence of Christ’s redemptive suffering* that this suffering require to be unceasingly completed. (John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 24)

It is especially consoling to note that at the side of Christ, in the first and most exalted place, there is always his Mother through the exemplary testimony that she bears *by her whole life* to the “Gospel of suffering.” In her, the many and intense sufferings were amassed in such an interconnected way that they were not only a proof of her unshakable faith but also a contribution to the redemption of all. From the time of her secret conversation with the angel, she began to see in her mission as a mother her “destiny” to share, in a singular and unrepeatable way, in the very mission of her Son. (John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 25)

The first chapter of the Gospel of suffering, which speaks of persecutions and tribulations, contains *a special call to courage and fortitude*. Christ overcame the world through his Resurrection.... And through his Resurrection, he manifests *the victorious power of suffering*, and he wishes to imbue with the conviction of this power the hearts of those whom he chose as Apostles and those whom he continually chooses and sends forth. St Paul says: “All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12)....

The second chapter of the Gospel of suffering is written by all those *who suffer together with Christ*, uniting their human sufferings to his salvific suffering.... Down through the centuries and generations it has been seen that *in suffering there is concealed a particular power that draws a*

person interiorly close to Christ, a special grace.... By suffering the person discovers a new dimension of *his entire life and vocation*.... When his body is gravely ill, totally incapacitated, and the person is almost incapable of living and acting, all the more do interior *maturity and spiritual greatness* become evident, constituting a touching lesson to those who are healthy and normal.

This interior maturity and spiritual greatness in suffering are certainly the *result* of a particular *conversion* and cooperation with the grace of the Crucified Redeemer.... Suffering is, in itself, an experience of evil. But Christ has made suffering the firmest basis of the definitive good, the good of eternal salvation.... By the power of Christ's Cross, suffering becomes no longer the weakness of man but the power of God.

This interior process of conversion often begins and is set in motion with great difficulty. Almost always the individual enters suffering with a *typically human protest* and *with the question "why?"* The person asks the meaning of his suffering and seeks an answer to this question on the human level.... Man hears Christ's saving answer as he himself gradually becomes a sharer in the sufferings of Christ....

Christ does not explain in the abstract the reasons for suffering, but before all else says: "Follow me!" Come! Take part through your suffering in this work of saving the world. Gradually, *as the individual takes up his cross*, spiritually uniting himself to the Cross of Christ, the salvific meaning of suffering is revealed before him.... It is then that man finds in his suffering interior peace and even spiritual joy. (John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 25-26)

St Paul speaks of joy in the Letter to the Colossians: "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake" (Col 1:24). A source of joy is found in the *overcoming of the sense of the uselessness of suffering*, a feeling that is sometimes very strongly rooted in human suffering. This feeling not only consumes the person interiorly, but makes him a burden to others. The person feels condemned to receive help and assistance from others, and at the same time seems useless to himself. The discovery of the salvific meaning of suffering in union with Christ *transforms* this depressing *feeling*. Faith in sharing in the suffering of Christ brings with it the interior certainty that the suffering person "completes what is lacking in Christ's afflictions"; the certainty that in the spiritual dimension of the work of

Redemption *he is serving*, like Christ, *the salvation of his brothers and sisters*. Therefore he is carrying out an irreplaceable service. Suffering, more than anything else, clears the way for the grace that transforms human souls. The more a person is threatened by sin, the greater is the import of human suffering. And the more the Church needs to have recourse to human suffering for the salvation of the world. (John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 27)

The parable of the Good Samaritan belongs to the Gospel of suffering. For it indicates what the relationship of each of us must be toward our suffering neighbor. We are not allowed to “pass by on the other side” indifferently; we must “stop” beside him. *Everyone who stops beside the suffering of another person*, whatever form it may take, is a Good Samaritan. This stopping does not mean curiosity but availability. It is like the opening of the internal dispositions of the heart. The name “Good Samaritan” fits *every individual who is sensitive to the sufferings of others*, who “is moved” by the misfortune of another....

Nevertheless, the Good Samaritan of Christ’s parable does not stop at *sympathy* and *compassion* alone. They become for him an incentive to actions aimed at bringing help to the injured man. In other words, then, a Good Samaritan is *one who brings help in suffering*, whatever its nature may be. Help which is, as far as possible, effective. He puts his whole heart into it; he does not spare material means. We can say that he gives himself, his very “I,” opening this “I” to the other person. Here we touch upon one of the key points of all Christian anthropology. Man cannot “fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.”¹⁹ A Good Samaritan is *the person capable of exactly such a gift of self*. (John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 28)

This is the meaning of suffering, which is truly supernatural and at the same time human. It is *supernatural* because it is rooted in the divine mystery of the Redemption of the world, and it is likewise deeply *human*, because in it the person discovers himself, his own humanity, his own dignity, his own mission.

Suffering is part of the mystery of man.... It *fully reveals man to himself* and makes his supreme vocation clear;... thus, it is *indispensable*. Its effects on man’s improvement are particularly *dramatic*. When it is

completely accomplished and becomes the light of human life, it is *blessed*. “Through Christ and in Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful”²⁰....

Together with Mary, Mother of Christ, who stood beneath the Cross, we pause beside all the crosses of contemporary man.... And we ask all you who suffer to support us. We ask precisely you who are weak to become a source of strength for the Church and mankind. (John Paul II, Salvifici Doloris, 31)

How to Tell If You Are Really Patient

You are not really patient if you are willing to suffer only as much as you choose, until you choose, and only at the hands of those you choose. If you are really patient, you will take it all as coming from the hand of God, counting it as blessings.

*The following paragraphs from **The Imitation of Christ** will give you new insights on the reasons to be patient in the struggle.*

THE BELOVED: What is that you are saying, my son? Think how much I have suffered, I and my saints, and stop complaining. “Your protest, your battle against sin, has not yet called for bloodshed” (Heb 12:4). What you have to put up with is little enough, compared with those who have borne so much, been so strongly tempted, so grievously tried, sifted, and tested in so many ways.

Call to mind the much heavier sufferings of others; that will make you bear your own little miseries with a lighter heart. Perhaps to you they don’t look so very little. If so, see if your unwillingness to suffer is magnifying them for you. In any case, whether your troubles are little or great, try to bear them all with patience.

The better disposed you are to accept suffering, the more wisely you are acting, and the greater is the merit you are earning. You will find things easier to bear if you prepare yourself for suffering by getting your mind used to the idea.

Don’t say, “I can’t let So-and-so treat me like that; I really can’t put up with that kind of thing. He has got me into serious trouble, charging me with doing things that had never even entered my head. If it were anybody else, I wouldn’t mind; I’d just let it pass as one of those things you have to put up with.” That’s a silly way of thinking. You forget that patience is a

virtue, and that I will reward you for practicing it. All you can think of is the person concerned and the wrong he has done you.

A man is not really patient when he is willing to suffer patiently only as much as he thinks fit and only at the hands of those he chooses. If he is really patient, he won't mind who makes him suffer; his superior, his equal or someone below him, a good, holy man or a peevish, unpleasant one—it's all the same to him. Whenever things go against him, no matter how often or how gravely, no matter who or what is at the back of it, he takes it all thankfully from the hand of God, counting it as a substantial gain. In the eyes of God no trouble endured for his sake, be it ever so trivial, can be allowed to go by without earning merit.

If you want to gain the victory, then, be ready for battle. You can't win the crown of patience without having a fight. If you refuse to suffer, you are refusing that crown. But if you desire to be crowned, fight like a man and hold out in patience. There's no rest without toil, no victory without a battle.

THE LEARNER: Lord, let what seems impossible for me to do by nature become possible by your grace. You know how little I can stand, how soon I lose heart at the least little bit of trouble. Let every trial and affliction become something to be loved and desired; I desire to suffer for your name's sake. Suffering and affliction for your sake is the best medicine for my soul. (T. a Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*, 3, ch. 19)

Footnotes:

¹*Epistolarium*, 139, 1.

²*Life*, ch. 22.

³*Way of Perfection*, ch. 12.

⁴*Sol. an. ad D. c. I.*

⁵*Abelly*, 1.3, c. 43.

⁶*In Phil.* hom. 4.

⁷*In Eph.* hom. 8.

⁸*In Evang.* hom. 35.

⁹*Life*, addit.

¹⁰*Life*, ch. 30.

¹¹*Boll.* 31 Maii. Vit. c. 7.

¹²*Foundations* ch. 31.

¹³*Bacci*, 1. 2, ch. 20.

¹⁴*Spirit*, ch. 19.

¹⁵*Life*, Ch. 10.

¹⁶*Ascent*, book 2, ch. 7.

¹⁷*Spirit*, ch. 4.

¹⁸*The Way of Perfection*, ch. 37.

¹⁹*Gaudium et Spes*, 24.

²⁰*Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

Patience in Economic Downfall

Detachment from Wealth and Patience in Losing It

The love of money does not only consist of the desire for another person's property, but also in the attachment to wealth. Through the example of Jesus' detachment from riches one should learn to make no account of the loss of them.

Is anyone disturbed by the loss of property? Let him go to the Holy Scriptures; there one is advised to despise the world. One can meet no better example of detachment from money than that of Jesus who did not own any worldly goods. He always defended the poor and condemned those attached to riches. Through Jesus' detachment from riches one learns to make no account of the loss of them. Thus, Jesus set detachment from wealth as a training for the endurance of losses.

We should not be attached to wealth, since our Lord did not seek it. And if we lose the whole of it, we should bear the loss with serenity. The Spirit of the Lord, through the mouth of the Apostle, said: "The love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim 6:10). (Tertullian, *De Patientia*, 7)

The love of money does not only consist of the desire for another person's property, but also in the attachment to wealth. Even what seems to be our own belongs to another, for nothing is absolutely our own. All things belong to God to whom, we, too, belong. Thus, if we feel impatient when we suffer some loss, we show that we are attached to money, since we grieve for the loss of what is not really our own. We are seeking what actually belongs to another when we are unwilling to bear the loss of what belongs to another. The man who is upset and unable to bear his loss sins—one may say—against God; he prefers the things of earth to those of heaven. His soul—received from the Lord—is consumed with care for the things of this world.

Let us, then, renounce—if needed—worldly goods willingly to preserve those of heaven. One must say: "Let the whole world around me collapse as long as I gain enough patience to endure it." (Tertullian, *De Patientia*)

A man must bear with fortitude a slight loss caused by theft, violence, or even his own stupidity. If he is not ready to suffer this loss, he probably will not be willing either to sacrifice his own for the sake of charity. For a man who refuses to undergo an operation at the hands of another will be even less willing to put the knife in his own body.

Patience to endure, shown on occasions of loss, is a training in giving and sharing. He who does not fear loss is generous in giving. (Tertullian, *De Patientia*)

The pagans are unable to bear all loss; they set worldly goods before their own lives. Thus, in their love for wealth, they engage in lucrative but dangerous commerce on sea; to get rich they take up causes in the forum which have no chance to be won; they hire themselves out as fighters for the games; they enlist themselves in the military service; and even, without fear for wild beasts, they dwell in desolate regions to commit robbery.

We are different from them. We should not give up our life for money but money for our true life, either by voluntary charity or by the patient endurance of loss. (Tertullian, *De Patientia*)

The bereavement of relatives and friends by death belongs also, in some measure, to detachment; and in this we must especially practice patience. Some people, at the loss of a parent or friend, can find no rest. They shut themselves up to weep in their chamber, and giving free vent to their sorrow, become insupportable to all around them, by their want of patience.

I would ask these persons, for whom do they thus lament and shed tears? For God? Certainly not. God's will is that they should accept his plans. For the soul departed? By no means. If that soul is lost, she will abhor both you and your tears. If she is saved, and already in heaven, she will like you to thank God on her part. If still in purgatory, she will crave the help of your prayers; and she will wish you to bow with resignation to the divine will, and to become a saint, so that she will one day enjoy your company in paradise. Of what use, then, is all this weeping?

On one occasion, the Venerable Father Joseph Caracciolo was surrounded by his relatives, who were all bitterly lamenting the death of his brother. He said to them: "Come, come! Let us keep these tears for a better

purpose: to weep over the death of Jesus Christ, who has been to us a father, a brother, and spouse, and who died for love of us.”

On such occasions we must imitate Job, who, on hearing the news of the death of his sons, exclaimed, with full resignation to the divine will, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away”; God gave me my sons, and God has taken them away. “As it has pleased the Lord, so is it done; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). It has pleased God that such things should happen, and so it pleases me; may he be blessed forever. (St Alphonsus M. de’ Liguori, *The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*)

Patience in Poverty

In this life we are like actors in a play. When the play is over everything will be taken away from us. Why should we become attached to riches or try to retain dominion over the borrowed things of the world around us?

Consider for a moment how absurd and out of place it would be for an actor who plays the part of a millionaire on the stage to try to keep for himself the clothes, furniture, and servants that he used during his act.

He would be quite mad if he thought that he was the real owner of the things that had been lent him for his part in the play.

Now, this world is a great theater in which each person has his part to play, each person has some things, some property. When the play is over, however, everything is taken away from him because he no longer needs it. It would be just as idiotic and senseless for us to become attached to or try to have dominion over the borrowed things of the world around us, as for an actor to try to use according to his own wishes the things lent to him. (F. Suárez, *Mary of Nazareth*)

The needs of Jesus—like those of Mary and Joseph—were very few. Certainly we must work hard, but our heart must always be free and detached, for greed and avarice surround us on all sides, ready to trap us. If we have faith and do whatever we can, God always gives us what we need.

Our Lady did not complain or show any sign of being annoyed with poverty; at least St Luke says nothing about it. She had done all she could: she had knocked at every door. Then when the Child was born he filled her with peace and joy; his glance, his smile, his presence were so joyful that there was no time to think of anything else but him. Truly, the things of this

world mean very little to those who live in the presence of God, who think of him and enjoy his peace. The heart can concentrate on only one thing at a time if it wants to possess that thing completely; that is why it is so difficult for the rich—whose heart concentrates on riches—to possess the kingdom of heaven; that is why, on the other hand, it is so easy for the poor to possess the kingdom of heaven because they are free of these false attachments to earthly things which pass away and vanish. This explains why the woman who gave her two small coins to the Temple received such admiration and praise from Jesus (cf. Mk 12:41ff): she had nothing else to give.

A poor man is properly one who does not have what he desires. On the other hand, one who desires nothing, and is contented with his poverty, is, in fact, very rich. Of such St Paul says: “Having nothing, yet possessing all things” (2 Cor 6:10). The true lovers of God have nothing, and yet have everything. When temporal goods fail them, they exclaim: “My Jesus, you alone are sufficient for me”; and with this they rest satisfied.

Not only did the saints maintain patience in poverty, but sought to be despoiled of all, in order to live detached from all, and united with God alone. Let us be contented with that state of life in which God has placed us. Let our solicitude be not for earthly goods, but for those of Paradise, which are immeasurably greater, and last forever. Let us be fully persuaded of what St Teresa says: “The less we have here, the more we shall have there.”¹

St Bonaventure said that temporal goods were nothing more than a sort of bird cage to hinder the soul from flying to God. And St John Climacus² said that poverty, on the contrary, is a path that leads to God free of all hindrances. (St Alphonsus M. de’ Liguori, *The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*)

Our Lord himself said: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:3). In the other beatitudes, heaven in the next life is promised to the meek and to the clean of heart. To the poor, heaven (that is, heavenly joy) is promised even in this life: theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Yes, for even in the present life the poor enjoy a foretaste of paradise.

The poor in spirit are not those merely poor in earthly goods, but those who do not even desire them. They are those who, having enough to

be clothed and fed, live soberly, according to the advice of the Apostle: “If we have food and clothing, we are content with that” (1 Tim 6:8). (St Alphonsus M. de’ Liguori, *The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*)

One day Jesus Christ thus spoke to Blessed Angela of Foligno: “If poverty were not of great excellence, I would not have chosen it for myself, nor have bequeathed it to my elect.” Seeing Jesus detached from everything, the saints had a great affection for poverty. St Paul says that the ambition of growing rich is a snare of Satan, by which he has wrought the ruin of innumerable souls: “Those who want to get rich, fall into temptation, and into the snare of the devil, and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires, which drown men into destruction and perdition” (1 Tim 6:9).

Unhappy beings who, for the sake of vile creatures of earth, forfeit an infinite good, which is God! St Basil the Martyr was quite in the right, when the Emperor Licinius proposed to make him the chief among his [pagan] priests, if he would renounce Jesus Christ. He was right, I say, to reply: “Tell the emperor that were he to give me his whole kingdom, he would not give me as much as he would rob me of, by depriving me of God.”³ (St Alphonsus M. de’ Liguori, *The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*)

Let us be content then with God, and with those things which he gives us, rejoicing in our scarcity, when we stand in need of something we desire, and we do not have it; for this is our merit. “Not so much having nothing,” says St Bernard, “but the love of poverty, is considered a virtue.”⁴ Many are poor, but they do not love their poverty; thus, they merit nothing. (St Alphonsus M. de’ Liguori, *The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*)

This detachment from material possessions should be practiced by all. “Many,” says the same St Bernard, “wish to be detached; but on the condition that they lack nothing.”⁵ “Thus,” says St Francis de Sales, “they wish for the honor of poverty, but not the inconveniences of poverty.”⁶ To such persons is applicable the saying of Blessed Salomea, a nun of St Clare: “Those persons seeking sanctity who do not detach themselves from material goods shall be laughing stock to angels and to men. They pretend to be poor, yet they complain when they lack something.” Good Christians

act differently. (St Alphonsus M. de' Liguori, *The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*)

Footnotes:

¹*Foundations*, ch.14.

²*Scala sp. gr.* 17.

³*Boll.* April 26, Act. no. II.

⁴*Epist.* 100.

⁵*In Adventu Domini*, s. 4.

⁶*Introduction to Devout Life*, ch. 16.

16

Serenity

The Way of Meekness

Serenity should always accompany patience; while patience leads us to endure the difficulties, serenity curbs our unreasonable movements of anger. Serenity brings our disturbed sensibility under the command of our reason—illuminated by faith.

Life's internal movements are moderated by the virtue of *meekness*. The external movements are moderated and given goodness by the virtue of *clemency*. Its opposite is cruelty.

In some circumstances, we need to correct with severity. In the same manner that clemency mitigates a deserved punishment, the virtue of meekness injects a note of serenity and calmness to our actions. With the moderation of meekness—related to temperance—the light of reason and the help of grace take control over our sensible appetites.

But to be true, meekness should be settled, not in our words and gestures, but in our heart. Otherwise, it is only a matter of tactics.

In his Sermon on the Mountain, Jesus gave the guidelines for Christian living. In the second beatitude, our Lord commended the meek with these words, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Mt 5:5).

The psalms had also praised the meek in very similar terms: “The meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace” (Ps 37:11). The Hebrew word for meek is *‘anawim*, “the poor of God.” This word did not exactly apply to those penniless, destitute of fortune, but had a precise religious-biblical meaning.

In the Greek rendering of the Bible this concept was translated as *praeis*. The Greek word aptly describes the humble and serene meekness of the “poor of God.” The term “meek” (*praeis*) in the Old Testament implies much the same as “poor” (*ptôkhai*) but lays more emphasis on manly resignation to adversity and less on the adversity itself. This virtue is manifested in their compassionate goodness, self-denial, and docility to God's will.

The meek are told to receive in possession or inheritance “the earth.” “The earth” refers primarily to Holy Land, the Promised Land, an ideal not merely earthly and material, but really Messianic and spiritual. It is similar to inheriting *the kingdom of God*. Thus, the meek are promised the vision of God, or heaven.

The virtue of meekness differs from the meekness of temperament. The virtue imposes the government of reason illumined by faith over our sensibility disturbed by anger. Thus, a serene person is not to be confused with a feeble one or a weak character; the latter is often serene with those who please him and ill-tempered with others.

Serenity and meekness is the most visible and charming part of charity. They appear in the gaze, the smile, the bearing, the speech of a friend; they double the value of the service rendered.

Wrath generates intense and prolonged disturbances in human life.

Self-control and balanced judgment; careful, serene reflection; control of our nerves and imagination: All this requires effort and firmness—and perseverance. That is the price of serenity.

Jesus, the Model of Meekness for Us to Imitate

The prophet Isaiah (Is 40:25-31), together with the psalm (Ps 102:1-2.8.10), invites us to contemplate the greatness of God as opposed to that weakness of our own that we know through the experience of our repeated falls into sin. And they tell us that “the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Ps 102:8), and that those who hope in him “shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Is 40:31).

The Messiah brought a yoke and a burden to humankind. But this yoke is easy to bear because it liberates us, and the burden does not weigh us down because he himself carries the heaviest part. Our Lord never oppresses us with his instructions and commands. On the contrary, they make us freer and simplify our life. In the Gospel we hear Jesus say to us: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Mt 11:28-30). Our Lord proposes himself as a model of meekness and humility, virtues and dispositions of the heart, which always go together.

As Jesus talks to the people who follow him, “harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd” (Mt 9:36), he wins their trust through the meekness of his heart, always so welcoming and understanding.

The liturgy shows us Christ as “gentle and lowly” so that we can go to him in all simplicity, and also so that we can prepare for Christmas by trying to imitate him. Only in this way will we be able to understand what is happening at Bethlehem. Only in this way will we be able to get those around us to come with us toward the baby who is God.

Souls open wide to a heart that is gentle and lowly, like Christ’s. There, in his most lovable Heart, the crowds used to find shelter and rest; and even now they still feel strongly attracted by him and find peace in him. Our Lord has told us to learn from him. The fruitfulness of all apostolates will always be very closely bound up with this virtue of meekness.

If we look closely at Jesus we will see how patient he is with the defects of his disciples, and how unweariedly he repeats the same teaching over and over again, explaining it in detail, so that his slow-minded and easily-distracted friends can master his saving doctrine. He never loses patience with their obtuseness and failure to grasp his meaning. Truly, Jesus “who is our master and Lord at the same time is meek and humble of heart, acted patiently in attracting and inviting his disciples.”¹

The way to cure our bad temper, impatience, and failure to be warm and understanding is to imitate Jesus in his meekness. This calm and welcoming spirit will be born and develop in us in exact proportion to our efforts to remember the constant presence of God and to think more often about our Lord’s life. “How I wish your bearing and conversation were such that, on seeing or hearing you, people would say: This man reads the life of Jesus Christ.”² To contemplate Jesus will especially help us not to be arrogant, and not to lose our tempers when things go wrong.

We must not make the mistake of thinking that this “bad temper” of ours, which bursts out in very definite circumstances and times, depends on the character of the people around us. “The peace of our spirit does not depend on the good nature and kindness of other people. Our neighbors’

good nature and kindness are in no way subject to our control or opinion. That would be absurd. The tranquility of our heart depends on ourselves. The ability to avoid anger, with all its ridiculous effects, has to come from within ourselves and not be dependent on the nature of other people. The power to overcome the evil in our character must not depend on some perfection outside us, but on our own virtue.”³

Meekness is particularly necessary in circumstances where living with other people is very difficult. (F. Fernandez Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 1, 11)

Meekness Rooted in Great Spiritual Strength

Meekness does not go with being feeble or characterless. On the contrary, it is found on great spiritual strength. The very practice of this virtue calls for continuous acts of such strength. Just as, according to the Gospel, the poor are those who are truly rich, so the meek are those who are truly strong. “Blessed are the meek because they, in this world’s warfare, are protected against the devil and against earthly persecutors. They are like glassware so well packed into straw or hay that it is not broken when it is struck. Meekness is like a strong shield, which blunts and shatters the sharp arrows of anger. The meek are like people dressed in garments of thick quilted cotton which protect them without harming anyone else.”⁴

Anger in all its many forms is the material on which this virtue has to work. Meekness controls and directs it, so that it is aroused only when necessary and to the extent to which it is necessary.

“Learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart.” Comparing it to the majesty of God, who has made himself a Baby in Bethlehem, we see our own life in its real proportions. And what could have seemed an enormous trial shrinks to its true insignificant size. As we contemplate the birth of Jesus, we find that our prayer comes alive, our love becomes wider and deeper, and our peace more unshakable.

Close to him, we learn to consider the various happenings of our everyday life in his presence and so give them their true value, to be silent sometimes when we would have liked to speak, to smile, to be nice to everybody, to wait for the right moment in which to correct a fault. At the same time, we are ready to leap to the defense of truth and the interests of God and of other people with as much force as may be necessary. For there is no opposition between meekness, closely connected as it is with humility,

and a righteous anger against injustice. Meekness is not a shelter for cowardice.

An anger that protects the rights of other people—and most especially the sovereignty and holiness of God—is virtuous and holy. We see the virtuous anger of Jesus against the Pharisees and traders in the Temple (Jn 2:13-17). Our Lord found the Temple turned “into a den of robbers,” a place where there was no reverence, given over to business which had nothing to do with the true worship of God. Our Lord was terribly angry, and showed it by word and deed. The evangelists have shown us few scenes as forceful as this one.

And yet, together with his virtuous anger with those who prostitute that holy place, Jesus shows us simultaneously his great compassion for the needy. “And the blind and the lame came to him in the Temple and he healed them” (Mt 21:14). (F. Fernandez Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 1, 11)

The Fruits of Meekness; Its Necessity for Social Life and Apostolate

Meekness sets its face against those pointless displays of violence, which at the bottom are signs of weakness, such as impatience, irritation, bad temper, and hatred. It is opposed to all useless waste of energy in unnecessary anger, that so often originates in little things that could have been passed over in silence or with a smile, and which never has any useful results.

Those explosions of bad temper between husband and wife, that can gradually corrode true love, stem from a lack of this virtue. So does irritability, with its serious consequences for the bringing up of children. The same lack of meekness destroys our peace in prayer, because instead of talking to God we brood over our injuries. The absence of meekness leads to that bad temper in conversation which makes even the most solid arguments powerless to convince. Mastery of oneself—which is part of true meekness—is the weapon of those who are really strong; it prevents us from answering back too quickly and from speaking wounding words that afterwards we wish we had never said. Meekness knows how to wait for the right moment, and to express its judgements in a way that carries conviction.

The habitual lack of meekness is the result of pride, and produces nothing but loneliness and sterility. “Your ill-temper, your roughness, your

unfriendliness, your rigidity (not very Christian!) are the reasons why you find yourself alone, in the loneliness of someone who is selfish, embittered, eternally discontented or resentful; and they are also the reason why you are surrounded not by love but by indifference, coldness, resentment, and lack of trust.

“With your good humor, your understanding and your friendliness, with the meekness of Christ as part and parcel of your life, not only should you be happy, but you should bring happiness to everyone around you, to the people you meet on the road of your life.”⁵

“The meek shall inherit the earth.” First they will possess themselves, because they will not be the slaves of their impatience and bad temper; they will possess God, because their souls will always be inclined to prayer, in a continual consciousness of the presence of God; they will possess those around them, because they have the kind of hearts which win friendship and affection, indispensable for everyday social life and for all apostolate. As we pass through the world, we must spread around us the “fragrance of Christ” (2 Cor 2:15), habitual smile, good humor and happiness, love and understanding.

Let us examine ourselves on our readiness to make the sacrifices necessary to make life pleasant for other people. Let us see if we are able to give way to other people’s opinions, instead of claiming to be always right about everything, and if we know how to control our temper and disregard the frictions, which are inevitable in daily life. This is a good time for strengthening this attitude of mind. We will achieve it if we talk more often to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph; if we make a real effort every day to be more understanding with the people around us; if we never stop trying to smooth out the rough edges of our characters; if we know how to go to the Tabernacle to talk over with our Lord the subjects which are uppermost in our thoughts. (F. Fernández Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 1, 11)

Serenity: Seeing Things as They Are

The peace that God gives is not an absence of difficulties, but the ability to maintain problems under control.

*This peace and calm, the serenity that we so much hope will be the Holy Spirit’s gift to us. **It is only our being children of God that gives us such sense of security.** Aware of what we are, we can say, “The Lord is my light, and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?, ” and we will stay tranquil.*

The serenity that God gives us is not a blindness to the realities of life, but the ability to face them with optimism, while trusting in our heavenly Father's help.

Rejecting evil and preserving goodness; patience deserves the name of virtue if we struggle with serenity, in spite of the difficulties. (St Augustine, *Sermon on Patience*).

With ascetical struggle, that is, putting into practice, right through the day the theological virtues, which are virtues to be lived before being theorized about—faith, hope, charity.... That is the way to have serenity. Serenity: that is a layman's way of describing one of the results of fortitude, temperance, justice, prudence; of the cardinal virtues. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, May 31, 1954)

When I was small, like all children I used to build little forts with mud and stones and bits of wood. If anyone walked on them and knocked them down.... I was really annoyed. What a catastrophe!

I am amused now to think back on it; I can only smile at those childish catastrophes. Yet, if we look at them supernaturally, very many of the preoccupations of older people and apparently very mature people are in the same category as children's games and childish catastrophes. (S. Canals, *Jesus as Friend*)

The virtue of serenity is a rare one that teaches us to see things in their true light and evaluate them properly. With balance and common sense we get to know the real, objective value of things; with our faith we get to know the supernatural value they should attain.

Serenity is missing when we deform reality; when we turn a molehill into a mountain; when things that should not cause us worry in fact do so; each and every time we fail to take account, in our judgments, of divine Providence and the eternal truths. If we bring into our lives the Christian virtue of serenity, what will remain of all these worries, anxieties, and surprises? Nothing, or almost nothing. (S. Canals, *Jesus as Friend*)

With the mere passage of time we can, almost always, look serenely at the past; but, isn't it true that only virtue can give us a serene attitude to

the present and the future?

Time, as it goes by, leaves everything in its place. Now that it's all over, that affair or that event, which caused us so much worry, is barely a shadow, a *chiaroscuro* in the general canvass of our life. Well, it is about this serenity in relation to the present and the future that I want to talk to you.

We need serenity of mind, to avoid being slaves of our nerves or victims of our imagination. We need serenity of heart, if we are to avoid being eaten up by anxiety or anguish. We need serenity in the way we act, to avoid darkness and empty-headed waste of energy. (S. Canals, *Jesus as Friend*)

A serene mind makes a person firm and steady, well able to direct others; a serene mind finds the right word at the right time to bring light and consolation; and it enables one to understand things properly and have a sense of perspective, to see the wood from the trees.

I think I should say it again: The virtue of serenity is a rare virtue, for many people's lives are ruled by their nerves; many are eaten up by their imagination; and there are some who turn everything into tragedy or melodrama.

The meticulous, pernickety person sees only details, and is so insistent that he suffocates others. The theoretical type can see nothing but general questions, and he withdraws from real life. Only the serene person is able to see the whole and the parts and integrate them properly.

A rigid person is not serene, for his rigidity takes him from giving due weight to circumstance, time, and place. His lack of serenity upsets and oppresses other people.

A weak person is not serene either, because he never goes far enough; due to his weakness he harms himself and other people. He doesn't get in other people's way, but fails to control events. He is ineffectual; he is at the mercy of the current. (S. Canals, *Jesus as Friend*)

Objectivity and a capacity to be specific, analysis and synthesis, gentleness and energy, a brake and a spur, an overview and awareness of detail: All these things and many more combine to produce, in a harmonious synthesis, the Christian virtue of serenity.

But neither you nor I nor anyone can be serene unless we first fight. Everyone has passions; imagination can disturb every mind; nerves exist in everyone's body; everyone is oversensitive in some area; ignorance, error, and exaggeration are to be found in everyone's mind; and fear and trembling can lurk in every heart. (S. Canals, *Jesus as Friend*)

Serenity should be a second nature to the Christian; for his faith is a source of serenity and harmony.

This panorama of our interior life that we have been considering has as its foundation a whole range of human virtues that bring balance, realism, and common sense. The virtue of faith, the true light of the soul, rises on this whole scene as the sun over a mountain range; it gives us a view of life and its various options that is full of serenity; it shows us a broad horizon rich in details. Through this serene vision the heart is set at ease, the soul finds calm, and the mind understands—with God's light—the meaning of many things, increasing thus the serene tranquility of your life.

Even those things we do not understand will not disturb our soul, for faith will teach us that the cause of them is always the goodness of God and his affection for man. (S. Canals, *Jesus as Friend*)

We should remember that,

- Christian serenity lives hidden under the dark veil of faith;
- Christian serenity comes down on us, bringing supernatural outlook, as the dew that comes down on flowers with the first light of the morning;
- Christian serenity is expressed in the words of Jesus: "Let not your heart be troubled; neither let it be afraid," and, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world if he suffers the loss of his soul?";
- Christian serenity fuses with those who pray as the rain soaks into the earth in springtime;
- Christian serenity puts down deep roots in those who learn to embrace and overcome sorrow through faith;
- Christian serenity settles down in those who are nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ;
- Christian serenity fills those who open themselves, sincerely and confidently, to their spiritual director;
- Christian serenity is the most delicate gift Jesus gives to those who are simple and uncomplicated. (S. Canals, *Jesus as Friend*)

Our Father God wants us,

- to be serene in the midst of the tests and difficulties of life—"constant in prayer, patient in tribulation, rejoicing in hope" (Rom 12:12);

- to be serene facing death and facing life: "Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Rom 14:8);

- to be serene in our everyday work, especially when it becomes hard and burdensome;

- to be serene when, due to our position, we have to give other people help and advice;

- to be serene when, at our desk, we face problems and professional decisions;

- to be serene in our sincere effort to be better: "By endurance you will gain your lives" (Lk 21:19). (S. Canals, *Jesus as Friend*)

We lack this serenity when we get annoyed with ourselves, and when we lose our peace on seeing our slow progress in the ways of the Lord. Serenity makes us understand that "no one becomes a saint all of a sudden"; and also that we will never find our Lord in noise and interior confusion, for the Lord comes in tranquility.

Therefore, if our prayer is serene in its resolutions, affections, and inspirations; it will produce better and more enduring results.

Apostolate, a great gift of God, is to give guidance, security, and serenity to souls as they make their way to God; thus, we must fill our apostolate with serenity.

And the Queen of serenity—we say it joyfully—is our heavenly Mother. (S. Canals, *Jesus as Friend*)

Serenity. Why lose your temper if by losing it you offend God, trouble your neighbor, give yourself a bad time ... and in the end, you have to recover your calm [usual self?] anyway? (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 8)

What you have just said, say it in another tone, without anger, and what you say will have more force ... and above all, you won't offend God. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 9)

Never reprimand anyone while you still feel angry over a fault that has been committed. Wait until the next day, or even longer. Then, once you are calm and have purified your intention, be sure to make your correction.

You'll gain more with an affectionate word than with three hours of quarrelling. Control your temper. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 10)

You clash with the character of one person or another.... It has to be that way; you are not a dollar bill to be liked by everyone.

Besides, without those clashes which arise in dealing with your neighbors, how could you ever lose the barbs, the sharp corners, the edges—imperfections and defects of your character—and acquire the perfect shape, the smoothness, and the firm mildness of charity, of perfection?

If your character and that of those around you were soft and sweet like marshmallows, you would never become a saint. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 20)

Don't argue. Arguments usually bring no light because the light is smothered by emotion. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 25)

Resentment has sharpened your tongue. Be silent! (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 654)

Always remain silent when you feel indignation surge up within you—even when you have reason to be angry.

For in spite of your discretion, you always say more than you want to in such moments. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 656)

"Jesus remains silent."—*Iesus autem tacebat*. Why do you speak, to console yourself or to explain yourself?

Say nothing. Seek joy in contempt; you'll always receive less contempt than you deserve. Can you, by any chance, ask, *Quid enim mali feci?*—What evil have I done? (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 671)

If you have presence of God, high above the deafening storm, the sun will always be shining on your eyes; and underneath the roaring and devastating waves, peace and calm will reign in your soul. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, 343)

Don't be confused; serenity is not laziness, carelessness, putting off decisions, or deferring the study of important matters.

Serenity is always completed with diligence, a virtue we need in order to consider and solve pending problems without delay. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, 467)

Plots, wretched misinterpretations cut to the measure of the base hearts that will listen to them, cowardly insinuations.... It is a picture that, sadly, we see over and over again, in different environments; they neither work themselves, nor let others work.

Meditate slowly on those verses of the Psalm: "My God, I have become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my mother's sons. Because zeal for thy house has consumed me, and the insults of those who insult thee have fallen on me." And keep on working. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, 797)

You need patience and humility, if you want to rise superior to all your enemies. (Thomas a Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*, I,13,3)

He who is angered with cause is not at fault; for if anger did not exist, laws would be valueless, courts would not exist, and crimes would go unpunished. He who is not angered, when there is cause to be so, sins; imprudent patience breeds vices, aids negligence, and invites evil doings, not only among wicked people, but also among good ones. (St Augustine, in *Catena Aurea*, I).

Do not limit your patience to this or that kind of offense or problem. Extend it universally to everything that God will send you or let happen to you. Some wish to suffer no hardships except those bringing honor or prestige; they wouldn't mind being wounded or made a prisoner in a victorious war, persecuted for religion, or impoverished by some public lawsuit which they will eventually win.

Such people do not love the cross, but the honor that goes with it. The truly patient man who really loves God endures equally hardships accompanied by shame, and those that bring prestige.

To be despised, criticized, or accused by evil men is a common deed for a courageous man; to be criticized, denounced, and treated badly by good men, by our own friends and relatives, is the test of virtue. (St Francis of Sales, *Introduction to Devout Life*, 3,3)

Be patient not only with the big part of the hardships that may come to you, but also with the natural consequences of these afflictions. Many would be ready to accept hardships provided they are not affected by the accompanying circumstances. “I wouldn’t be bothered by poverty,” one may say, “if it didn’t keep me from helping my friends, providing a high level of education to my children, or being surrounded by an aura of respectability, as I would like.” “Poverty wouldn’t bother me,” another may say, “if people didn’t think that it was my own fault.”

Now I say that we must be patient with whatever difficulties God may send us. (St Francis of Sales, *Introduction to Devout Life*, 3,3)

When you are hit by hardship, do your best and apply whatever remedy you may have—provided it is not an offense to God; to do otherwise is to tempt God. Having done this, wait with resignation for the results it may please God to send.

If it is God’s Will that the remedy overcomes the hardship, humbly give thanks to God. If the remedy is ineffectual, bless God with patience. (St Francis of Sales, *Introduction to Devout Life*, 3,3)

Complain as little as possible about the wrongs you suffer. Undoubtedly, a person who complains commits a sin by doing so. Self-love always imagines that injuries are worse than they really are. Above all, do not share your resentment with irritable or fault-finding persons. If there is just occasion for complaining to someone, either to correct an offense, or to restore your peace of mind, do so to persons who are even-tempered and really love God. Instead of calming your spirit, the others will stir up greater distress, and instead of pulling out the thorn that is hurting you, they will drive it deeper into your foot.

The truly patient man does not complain of his hard lot or desires to be pitied by others. He speaks of his sufferings in a natural, true, and sincere way, without maligning others, complaining or exaggerating his pain. (St Francis of Sales, *Introduction to Devout Life*, 3,3)

Patience knows how to bear everything with a magnanimous heart.
(Cassian, *Inst.*, 7)

Calmness in the Face of Difficulties

We need calm in all our reactions. We are threatened by evil sadness that may come from suffering, sickness, adversity, or, most of all, from the realization of our own wretchedness. When this happens, we should be able to hear the voice of Lord telling us, "Do not let your heart be troubled, or be afraid" (Jn 14:27), and find refuge in our divine filiation.

The Storm on the Lake

While sailing to the opposite shore of the Lake of Gennesareth, as the Lord had told them, the apostles were twice caught by a storm. St Mark (4:35-40) tells us that Jesus was with them in the boat. Our Lord was resting after a hard day's preaching. He lay down in the stern, reclining his head on a cushion, probably a simple, coarse leather bag stuffed with rags or wool. That was the usual thing the sailors had on these boats. The angels in heaven must have been gazing upon their King and Lord as he recovered his strength, lying upon the hard deck planking. He who governs the universe was stretched out there exhausted.

Meanwhile his disciples, many of them sailors, began to feel the first squalls of the gathering storm. It soon fell on them, with tremendous force ... "and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already filling." They did what they could, but the seas grew higher and rougher and they were about to founder. Then as a last resort they turned to Jesus. They woke him with a cry of distress. "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?"

God Will Never Abandon Us

The skill of those sea-hardened fishermen was not enough. Our Lord had to intervene. "And he awoke and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' And the wind ceased and there was a great calm." Peace also entered the hearts of those frightened men.

Sometimes the storm arises around us or within us. And it seems that our frail craft cannot take any more. At times we have the impression that God is heedless of our fate. The waves are breaking over us: personal weaknesses, professional or financial difficulties that are beyond our management, illness, problems with children or parents, the menace of

being denounced, a hostile environment, slander.... But “if you have presence of God, high above the deafening storm, the sun will always be shining on your eyes; and underneath the roaring and devastating waves, peace and calm will reign in your soul.”⁶

God will never abandon us. We must go to him, using all the means we need to employ. At all times, tell Jesus with the confidence of one who has taken him as his Master, and wants to follow him unconditionally, “Lord, do not leave me!” And together with him we will face up to those trials and surmount them. They will no longer be bitter, and we will not be dismayed by the storms that blow. (F. Fernández Carvajal, *Calmness in the Face of Difficulties*)

You suffer in this present life, which is only a dream, and a short one at that. Rejoice, because your Father God loves you so much, and if you put no obstacles in his way, after this bad dream he will give you a good awakening. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 692)

Facing Up to Misunderstandings

“Jesus awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’” This miracle made an unforgettable impression on the apostles. It confirmed them in their faith and prepared them for the harder, more testing battles that lay ahead. The sight of a perfectly calm sea, subject to the voice of Christ, was engraved on their hearts. Years afterwards, these men would pray, and the memory of this scene would bring peace to them as they underwent all the trials our Lord had forewarned them of.

On another occasion, on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus told them that what the prophets had foretold about the Son of Man was about to be fulfilled. “For he will be delivered to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spat upon; they will scourge him and kill him, and on the third day he will rise” (Lk 18:31-33). At the same time he warned them that they too will go through terrible times of persecution and slander. “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they malign those of his household?” (Mt 10:24). Jesus wanted to convince those first disciples—and us too—that there is no compromise possible between him and his doctrine on the one hand, and the world as a kingdom of sin on the other. He reminds them not to be surprised to be treated in this way: “If the

world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you” (Jn 15:18). Hence, as St Gregory explains, “the hostility of the wicked is like a praise for our way of life; it shows that there is at least some rectitude in us, as long as we oppose those who do not love God. Nobody can please God and the enemies of God at the same time.”⁷ If we are faithful there will be winds and storms. But Jesus will say once more to the stormy sea, “Peace! Be still!”

At the very beginning of the Church the apostles gathered abundant fruits. But at the same time they suffered threats, insults, and persecution. They were not concerned whether public opinion was favorable or hostile toward them; they were concerned to make Christ known to all, to take the fruits of our Redemption to the farthest corners of the earth. They preached the doctrine of Christ, which in purely human terms constituted a scandal for some and seemed sheer madness to others. This doctrine entered all environments, transforming souls and customs.

Many circumstances have changed since the times of the apostles, but others remain as they were or have become even worse. Materialism, the excessive love of comfort and well-being, sensuality, and ignorance represent once again in many places furious winds and stormy seas. And we can add to this the temptation of many people to adapt the doctrine of Christ to the times, seriously deforming the essential message of the Gospel.

If we want to be apostles in the midst of the world, we must realize that some people—at times our husband, our wife, our parents, or an old friend—will not understand us. We will have to take heart, because it is not easy to row against the stream. We will have to work calmly and firmly. We cannot be deterred or allow ourselves to be deflected by the attitude of those who, in many ways, have compromised; those who have so identified themselves with the customs of the new paganism that they seem unable to understand the transcendent, supernatural meaning of life.

Our intimacy with God will give us serenity and strength, and we will be a firm rock for many. We can never forget that, particularly nowadays, “the Lord needs strong and courageous souls who refuse to come to terms with mediocrity, but will be able to enter all kinds of environments with a sure step....”⁸ We should show our Christian criteria in parent-teacher associations, in professional bodies, in the universities, in the trade unions, in informal conversation before and after a meeting.

As a specific example, the influence of families is particularly important in social and public life. Christians “should be the first to take steps to see that the laws ... not only do not transgress against, but actually support and positively defend, the rights and duties of the family”⁹ promoting thus a real “family politics.” To do so, it is important to know the doctrine of the Church on the family, to awaken the consciences on the social and political responsibilities of Christian families, and to establish or strengthen existing associations for the good of the family.

We cannot remain inactive while the enemies of God strive to eliminate all trace of the eternal destiny of man. (F. Fernández Carvajal, *Calmness in the Face of Difficulties*)

Our Attitude toward Difficulties

We should learn how to endure physical and moral hardship without complaining. Pain, illness, suffering, the greatest catastrophes, are not blind forces unloosed on the world by chance; rather, they are obedient creatures fulfilling their own part in the universe, leading to the salvation of God's elect. Everything works for our good and the good of souls. It is enough to be in Jesus' company to be safe. Worry, fear, and cowardice arise when our prayer weakens. Our Lord knows well enough everything that is happening to us. And if need be, he will rebuke wind and sea, and a great calm will be established; his peace will flood into us, and we will be filled with awe like the apostles. Besides, the Blessed Virgin will not leave us for an instant.

Anxiety, terror, that unbearable fear of something that takes hold on life and oppresses it, all disappear in those seeking sanctity. These fears give way to an attitude of mastery toward the world, of imperturbable security in the face of any event, of understanding everything because everything means something to these people. They know where it comes from and where it leads. Living close to God through grace gives a full understanding of how everything in the universe has its place in God's plan. And this knowledge is the foundation of their serene attitude to life and everything life may bring.

Pain, illness, suffering, the greatest catastrophes, are not blind forces unloosed on the world by chance; rather, they are obedient creatures fulfilling their own part in the universe, leading to the salvation of God's elect. (F. Suárez, *Mary of Nazareth*)

According to St Augustine, patience is the virtue that allows us to bear adversity with a serene spirit. We should prize this serenity of soul because it allows us to obtain greater goods. The Christian should learn how to endure physical and moral hardship without complaining.

Usually we are presented with many different opportunities to practice this virtue in the ordinary circumstances of everyday life. The struggle may relate to the most mundane things—a character defect that keeps resurfacing, undertakings that don't go as we had planned, unexpected changes in schedule, the bad manners of a colleague at work, people who mean well but don't understand, traffic jams, delays in public transportation, too many phone calls, forgetfulness.... These are all occasions for us to grow in humility and become more refined in our charity. (F. Fernández Carvajal, *In Conversation with God*, 5, 94)

“The three concupiscences (cf. 1 Jn 2:16) are like three gigantic forces which have unleashed a tremendous frenzy of lust, of man's conceited pride in his own strength, and of a desire for riches'.... And without being pessimistic or depressed, we can see that ... these forces have achieved an unprecedented development and a monstrous aggressiveness, to such an extent that 'an entire civilization is tottering, powerless and without moral resources to fall back on.'”¹⁰

We cannot remain inactive in such a situation. “For the love of Christ compels us” (2 Cor 5:14). Charity, and the real need of so many creatures, drives us to carry out an untiring apostolic activity in all places. Each person has to work in his own environment, in spite of the hostility we will meet and the misunderstandings of people who cannot or do not want to understand.

“Walk therefore *in nomine Domini*—with joy and security in the name of the Lord. No pessimism! If difficulties arise, the grace of God will come more abundantly. If more difficulties appear, more of God's grace will come down from heaven. If there are many difficulties, there will be many graces from God. Divine help is always proportionate to the obstacles with which the world and the devil oppose apostolic work. And so I would even dare to affirm that, in a way, it is good that there are difficulties, because then we will obtain more help from God. ‘Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more’ (Rom 5:20).”¹¹

While meditating on this passage of the Gospel, we can purify our intentions, promise to be more attentive to the Master, and strengthen our faith. Our attitude must always be one of forgiveness and serenity, because God is with each of us. “Christian, Christ is sleeping in your boat,” St Augustine reminds us; “wake him, and he will rebuke the storm and peace will be restored.”¹²

Everything works for our good and the good of souls. It is enough to be in Jesus’ company to be safe. Worry, fear, and cowardice arise when our prayer weakens. He knows well enough everything that is happening to us. And if need be, he will rebuke wind and sea, and a great calm will be established; his peace will flood into us, and we will be filled with awe like the apostles.

The Blessed Virgin will not leave us for an instant. “If the winds of temptation arise, fix your eyes in the star, call upon Mary ... With her for a guide you will not go astray; while invoking her, you will never lose heart; so long as she is in your mind, you are safe from deception. If she holds your hand, you cannot fall; under her protection you have nothing to fear; if she walks before you, you will not get tired; if she shows you favor, you will reach the goal.”¹³

Patience and Inner Peace

Patience imparts a superior quality to the soul as a person perfects his interior life. Those souls who are most intimately united with God bear any trials and tribulations with joy and inner peace.

Christians love all men, yet all men persecute them. Condemned because they are not understood, they are put to death, but raised to life again. They live in poverty, yet enrich many. They are defamed, and in their defamation find their glory. They are slandered, and are vindicated. A blessing is their answer to abuse, deference their response to insult.

For the good they do, they receive the punishment of malefactors, but even then they rejoice, as though receiving the gift of life. They are attacked by the Jews as aliens, they are persecuted by the Greeks, yet no one can explain the reason for this hatred. (*Epistle to Diognetus*, circa year 124)

When I lived in the desert, I had a reed to write with. It always seemed to me, I remember, either too thick or too thin. I had to shape its point with a blunt knife that hardly could cut. I had to light the candle with

a flint, whose spark flashed too late to satisfy my urgency to begin my writing. In those instances, I felt waves of indignation within me, leading me to proffer curses against these inanimate objects, or against Satan himself.

This experience manifests of how little value it is to isolate oneself and thus avoid the possibility of quarrels, if one has not first acquired patience. Our wrath would fall on even inanimate objects, should we lack someone on whom to rent our blows. (Cassian, *Inst.*, 8,17)

Being patient means that one will not allow his serenity, objectivity, and unbiased criteria to be swept away by the wounds received while doing good. (J. Pieper, *The Fundamental Truths*)

Someone avoiding evil cannot be called patient, but rather he who does not allow himself to fall into an unwarranted state of sadness by the presence of evil. (St Thomas of Aquinas, *S.Th.*, 2-2, q136, a4 ad2)

Patience is tolerating, with a tranquil spirit, the wrongs we encounter, never resenting those that caused them. (St Gregory the Great, *Moralia*, 13)

Cassian relates that an old man in Alexandria was surrounded by the mob uttering insults against him, for being a Christian. He stood in the middle, like a lamb, suffering in silence, with great peace of heart. They mocked him and gave him blows. Among other things, they shouted at him with scorn: “What miracles has Jesus Christ performed?” He answered back: “One of his miracles is that suffering the injuries that you are doing to me, I feel no indignation or anger against you, no irritation or passion within me.”

Serenity! Daring!

With these virtues, rout the fifth column of the lukewarm, the timid, and the treacherous. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 112)

You told me that God sometimes—briefly—fills you with lights and sometimes does not.

I reminded you—firmly—that the Lord is always infinitely good. Thus, those moments of light are enough for you to carry on; but those times of

darkness are good for you too, to make you more faithful. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 341)

God is with you; cast away spiritual worry and fear. Cut them off at the root and with determination, for they only breed temptations and increase danger. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 854)

Even if everything should collapse and fail; events turn upside down causing great adversity, nothing is gained by being perturbed. Furthermore, remember the confident prayer of the prophet: “The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; he will save us.”

Pray it with devotion every day, so that your behavior may adjust itself to the plans of Providence, which governs us for our own good. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 855)

As soon as you have truly abandoned yourself in the Lord, you will learn how to accept whatever comes. You will not lose serenity if your efforts—despite having drawn all your skills and used the proper means—do not achieve the desired results. Because they will have *turned out* as God wanted them to. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 860)

A paradox: Ever since I decided to follow the advice of the psalm: “Cast your cares upon the Lord, and he will sustain you,” each day I have fewer worries on my mind. Then, after completing the needed tasks, everything is more easily solved. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 873)

It is wrong to judge a person merely by his first words ... or by his last ones.

Listen with respect, with interest. Give due credit where due..., but carefully ponder your judgement in the presence of God. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 906)

For you who have a great problem; if you approach it properly, that is, with a calm and responsible supernatural outlook, you will always find a solution. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 958)

I understand your holy impatience, but you must also realize that some need to think things over, and that others will respond all in good time.... Wait for them with open arms. Flavor your holy impatience with abundant prayer and mortification.... They will come more youthful and generous. They will have got rid of their bourgeois approach, and they will be all the more courageous.

Think how God is waiting for them! (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 206)

I do not deny that you are clever. But your irrational vehemence leads you to act like a fool. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 439)

If, by fixing your sight on God, you can maintain serenity in the face of worries, forget petty things, jealousies, and envies, you will avoid the exertion of so much effort that is needed to work effectively in the service of men. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 856)

Holy Mary is—as the Church invokes her—the Queen of peace. So when there is turmoil in your soul, or your family, or at work, or in society, or between nations, cry out to her, unceasingly, in this way: *Regina pacis, ora pro nobis*—Queen of peace, pray for us. Have you, at least, tried it when you have lost your peace of mind?...—You will be surprised at its instantaneous effect. (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 874)

Gentleness and Wrath

A man who is angry seems to have prevailed; but in fact, he is overcome and hurt by a grievous passion. A man who endures nobly, and remains calm got the better and conquered. His inner victory is a sign of strength.

When the Body of our Lord was placed in the sepulcher, the Jews tried to put seals and lookouts on the Truth. But all these safeguards only made the Truth more conspicuous. And the mocking, jeering, and reviling became causes of self-shame. Such is the nature of error: it destroys the very means it uses. They that seem to have conquered are put to shame, defeated, and ruined. But He that seemed to have been defeated shone forth above all men and conquered mightily.

A man after being wronged may get angry, overreact, and conquer the wrongdoer; but this is an evil victory that brings destruction to the winner. The one who bears it with patience and self-control conquers and wins a crown. Often, to be defeated is the best mode of victory.

We should not seek that kind of victory, or shun this kind of defeat. That victory brings harm, this defeat, profit.

A man who is angry seems to have prevailed; but in fact, he is overcome and hurt by a grievous passion. A man who endures nobly, and remains calm got the better and conquered. His inner victory is a sign of strength.

By being struck, the rocks of the sea break the waves. Thus also with the saints; by their patience and endurance in the face of difficulties they won, were crowned, and conquered a glorious trophy. (St John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Matthaeum*, 84)

In Christian parlance, the notions of “sensuality,” “passion,” “desire” are customarily—though very unjustly—understood exclusively as “anti-spiritual sensuality,” “wicked passion,” “rebellious desire.” Such a constriction of an originally much broader meaning obscures the important fact that all these notions by no means have a merely negative sense. Rather, they represent forces from which the essence of human nature is built up and draws its life.

The same is true of the notion of *wrath* or *anger*. At the mention of anger, Christian awareness sees as a rule only the uncontrolled, the anti-spiritual, the negative aspect. But, as with “sensuality” and “desire,” the power of wrath also belongs to the primal forces of the human. In this power of wrath, the energy of human nature is most clearly expressed. It is a force directed toward the difficulty of achieving a good or because of the difficulty of overcoming an evil. Wrath is the strength to attack the repugnant. The power of anger is actually the power of resistance in the soul.

Whoever, therefore, stigmatizes the power of wrath as something in itself anti-spiritual and consequently to be “mortified” is committing the same error as one who similarly slights “sensuality,” “passion,” and “desire.” Both condemn the basic forces of our being, offending the Creator who, as the liturgy of the Church says, has “marvelously established the dignity of human nature.” (J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*)

Concerning wrath (in the narrower sense), understood as the passionate desire for just retribution of injustice that has been suffered, St Thomas, in repudiation of the Stoics, says the following: “Because the nature of man is constructed of soul and body, of spirit and sensuality, it belongs to the good of man to devote himself utterly to virtue, namely with spirit, sensuality, and body alike. And therefore man’s virtue requires that the will for just retribution reside not only in the spiritual realm of the soul, but also in sensuality and in the body itself.” This passage is found in the great work of St. Thomas’ later life, the *De Malo*, in an article discussing the question “whether all wrath is evil.”

Anger is *good* if, in accordance with the order of reason, it is brought into service for the true goals of man. One who does good with passion is more praiseworthy than one who is “not entirely” afire for the good, even to the forces of the sensual realm. Gregory the Great says, “Reason opposes evil the more effectively when anger ministers at her side.” And what was said of the power of sexual desire, which overwhelms reason, is likewise true of the obscuring power of anger. “It is not contrary to the nature of virtue that the consideration of reason comes to a stop in the execution of that which reason has already considered. Even art would be impeded in its activity if it should wish to consider what was to be done where it was a question of immediate action.”

The surprise with which we reflect on these statements makes us aware once again how far we are from considering the whole man in our conception of the moral good. We realize how much we almost unconsciously tend to take the “purely spiritual” for actual humanity. On the other hand, the “ancients” can teach us much and make us once again embrace the full created nature of world and man, in its true reality. (J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*)

It is self-evident that the anger which breaks all bounds and disrupts the order of reason is evil and is sin. Blind wrath, bitterness of spirit, and revengeful resentment—the three basic forms of intemperate anger—are therefore evil and contrary to order.

Blind wrath shuts the eyes of the spirit before they have been able to grasp the facts and to judge them. Bitterness and resentment, with a grim joy in negation, close their ears to the language of truth and love. They

poison the heart like a festering ulcer. Also evil, of course, is all anger linked to unjust desire. This needs no further discussion.

In the upsurge of his self-will, the intemperately angry man feels as if he were drawing his whole being together like a club ready to strike. But this is the very thing he fails to achieve. Only gentleness and mildness can accomplish it. The two are not equivalent: mildness is gentleness turned toward what is without. “Gentleness above all makes man master of himself.” Holy Scripture speaks of this virtue in much the same terms as of patience. In St Luke’s Gospel, it is said of patience that through it man possesses his soul. And of gentleness, it is said, “Possess thy soul through gentleness” (Sir 10:31).

Gentleness, however, does not signify that the original power of wrath is weakened or, worse still, “mortified,” just as chastity does not imply a weakening of sexual power. On the contrary, gentleness as a virtue presupposes the power of wrath; gentleness implies mastery of this power, not its weakening. We should not mistake the pale-faced harmlessness which pretends to be gentleness—unfortunately often successfully—for a Christian virtue. Lack of sensuality is not chastity; and incapacity for wrath has nothing to do with gentleness. Such incapacity not only is not a virtue, but, as St Thomas expressly says, a fault: *peccatum ad vitium*. (J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*)

Behave kindly to all, to superiors and inferiors, to the high-born and peasant, to relatives and strangers; but more especially to the poor and infirm, and, above all, to those who regard us with an evil eye.

Gentleness in the correction of faults is more efficacious than any other means or reasons that may be employed. Be therefore on your guard against correcting in a fit of passion; for then harshness is sure to be mingled with it, either in word or action. Beware likewise of correcting the person in fault while he is excited; for in like cases the result is exasperation instead of improvement. (A. M. de’ Liguori, *The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*)

The patient man cannot be sundered from the love of God, and does not need to calm his spirit, for he knows that all is for the best. He is never irked, and nothing moves him to anger, for he is settled in the love of God and this is his only concern. (St Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 6)

Just as victory attests to the soldier's valor in battle, unbreakable patience through toil and temptation reveals a man's holiness. (St Cyril, in *Catena Aurea*, 4)

Endurance and Attack

Christian endurance maintains a man steady in the struggle; patience keeps him away from the danger that his spirit may be broken by grief, and lose its greatness. This stout resistance is a kind of attack.

Enduring comprises a strong activity of the soul, namely, a vigorous grasping of and clinging to the good; and only from this stout-hearted activity can the strength to support the physical and spiritual suffering of injury and death be nourished. It cannot be denied that a timid Christianity, overwhelmed and frightened by the un-Christian criteria of an ideal of fortitude that is activistically heroic, has smothered this fact in the general consciousness, and misconstrued it in the sense of a vague and resentful passivism. (J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*)

Patience keeps man from the danger that his spirit may be broken by grief and lose its greatness. Patience, therefore, is not the tear-veiled mirror of a "broken" life (as one might easily assume in the face of what is frequently presented and praised under this name), but the radiant embodiment of ultimate integrity. (J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*)

Footnotes:

¹Second Vatican Council, *Dignitatis Humanae*, 11.

²St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 2.

³Cassian, *Constitutions*, 8.

⁴F. Osuna, *Third Spiritual Alphabet*, III, 4.

⁵S. Canals, *Jesus as Friend*.

⁶St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, 343.

⁷*Homilies on Ezekiel*, 9.

⁸St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 416.

⁹*Familiaris Consortio*, 44.

¹⁰A. del Portillo, *Letter*, Dec. 25, 1985, 4, quoting St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Letter*, Feb. 14, 1974, 10.

¹¹A. del Portillo, *Letter*, May 31 1987, 22.

¹²*Sermon 361*, 7.

¹³St Bernard, *Homilies on the Blessed Virgin Mary*, 2.