

"Those who love know how to wait"

In his 27 March general audience, Pope Francis continued his catechetical cycle on vices and virtues, speaking about the virtue of patience.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Last Sunday we listened to the account of the Passion of the Lord. Jesus responds to the sufferings He endures with a virtue that, although

it is not considered among the traditional ones, is so important: *patience*. It regards the forbearance of what one suffers: it is not a coincidence that *patience* has the same root as *passion*. And it is precisely in the Passion that Christ's patience emerges, as with meekness and mildness He accepts being arrested, beaten and condemned unjustly; He does not recriminate before Pilate; He bears being insulted, spat upon and flagellated by the soldiers; He carries the weight of the cross; He forgives those who nail Him to the wood; and on the cross, He does not respond to provocations, but rather offers mercy. All of this tells us that Jesus' patience does not consist of a stoical resistance to suffering, but is *the fruit of a greater love*.

The Apostle Paul, in the so-called “hymn to charity” (cf. *1 Cor 13:4-7*) closely links *love and patience*.

Indeed, in describing the first quality of charity, he uses a word that is translated as “magnanimous” or “patient.” It expresses a surprising concept, which frequently appears in the Bible: God, faced with our infidelity, shows Himself to be “slow to anger” (cf. *Ex* 34:6; cf. *Nm* 14:18): instead of unleashing His disgust at man’s evil and sin, He reveals Himself to be greater, always ready to start afresh with infinite patience. This, for Paul, is the first feature of God’s love, which in the face of sin proposes forgiveness. But not only that: it is the first trait of every great love, which knows how to respond to evil with good, which does not withdraw in anger and discouragement, but perseveres and tries again. So, at the root of patience is love, as Saint Augustine says: “Each one of the just is in that measure for endurance of any ills more brave, in what measure in him the love of God is mightier” (*De patientia*, XVII).

One might say, then, that there is no better witness to Christ's love than encountering a *patient Christian*. But think of how many mothers and fathers, workers, doctors and nurses, the sick, who every day, in obscurity, grace the world with saintly patience! As the Scripture affirms, "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty" (*Pr 16:32*).

However, we must be honest: we often lack patience. We need it as an "essential vitamin" in order to get by, but it comes to us instinctively to become impatient and to respond to evil with evil; it is difficult to stay calm, to control our instincts, to refrain from bad responses, to defuse quarrels and conflicts in the family, at work, in the Christian community.

But let us remember that patience is not only a need, it is a *calling*: if Christ is patient, the Christian is called to be patient. And this demands that we go against the tide

with respect to today's widespread mentality, dominated by haste and wish for "everything straight away;" in which, instead of waiting for situations to mature, people are pressed, in the expectation that they will change immediately. Let us not forget that haste and impatience are the enemies of spiritual life: God is love, and those who love do not tire, they are not irascible, they do not give ultimatums, but know how to wait. Think of the account of the merciful Father, who awaits his son who has left home: he suffers patiently, impatient only to embrace him as soon as he sees him return (cf. *Lk* 15:21); or the parable of the wheat and the weeds, with the Lord who is not in a hurry to uproot evil before its time, so that nothing is lost (cf. *Mt* 13:29-30).

But how can one *grow in patience*? Since, as Saint Paul teaches us, it is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Gal* 5:22),

one must ask for it from the Spirit of Christ. He gives us the meek strength of patience, because “Christian virtue is not only a matter of doing good, but of tolerating evil as well” (Augustine, *Sermons*, 46,13). In these days especially, it will be good for us to contemplate the Crucified One to assimilate His patience.

Another good exercise is to take to Him the most bothersome people, asking for the grace to put into practice towards them that work of mercy so well known, yet so disregarded: patiently enduring troublesome people. It starts by asking to look at them with compassion, with God's gaze, knowing how to distinguish their faces from their faults.

Finally, to cultivate patience, a virtue which gives breath to life, it is good to *broaden one's outlook*. For example, by not restricting the field of the world to our own troubles, as

the *Imitation of Christ* invites us to do: “Well may you remember the very painful woes of others, that you may bear your own little ones the more easily,” recalling that “with God nothing that is suffered for His sake, no matter how small, can pass without reward” (III, 19). And again, when we feel we are in the grip of adversity, as Job teaches us, it is good to open ourselves with hope to the newness of God, in the unwavering confidence that He does not let our expectations be disappointed.
