

## **Fifth Sunday of Easter B - Patience is vital in trusting God as our life circumstances are not always what we would prefer**

May 2, 2021

For years, many of us Catholics call this the “vines and branches” Sunday. But this year, I will focus on the first reading with regard to St. Paul.

I remember visiting a grade 3 class in St Anne School after the children’s first communion. I asked the class why we go to mass on Sunday. One kid replied, “Jesus prepared a meal for us and if we don’t go, He will be sad.” What a wonderful answer! We attend mass every Sunday in-person, and now virtually due to the COVID 19 pandemic, because we love Jesus Christ and we want to follow him more closely. We know that a follower of Christ should be **patient, self-controlled, faithful, generous, and kind**. And we also know that although we try to follow that recipe, many times we get distracted. In the face of this contrast between the desire of our hearts and the reality of our daily lives, we may get frustrated. But today the Church is giving us an antidote to that frustration in the example of St Paul.

In this Sunday’s First Reading (Acts 9:26-31), St Paul shows up in Jerusalem three years after his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus. He has been a faithful follower of Christ for three years already. And yet, what happens when he arrives in Jerusalem? His bold and abrasive personality gets him in trouble right away. **“When Saul arrived in Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple.”** He shows up full of faith and love for Christ, overflowing with zeal and sincerity. But his old violent and intimidating temperament hasn't gone away. In a matter of days, he instills deep fear in the Christians, and he infuriates the Jews so much that they plot to kill him! Things are so bad, in fact, that he has to be sent away to Tarsus, his home town, 500 miles away! And notice what happens as soon as he’s gone; St Luke writes: **“The Church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria was at peace.”** The great St Paul didn't become a saint overnight. It took time for God's grace to transform him, and it will take time for God's grace to transform us too.

Patience is needed every day, especially in the face of trials. Love is even more needed, because **there is no patience without love. Love is demonstrated in several ways: in listening, seeing, welcoming and reacting.** It does not allow negative thoughts to invade our minds, nor to infiltrate our feelings. It brings down all evil and intolerance, restores our understanding, allows us to act in an integral way and to keep only what is really important within us. **When we are patient, it builds our character, we avoid mistakes, and we’re going to reach our goals.** When we are patient, we’re going to be honoured by others and have happier relationships. There are all kinds of blessings and benefits. Have you noticed—especially during this time of the coronavirus—that it’s hard to be patient when you’re tired? We’re all feeling weary from the drawn-out uncertainty and craziness of the pandemic.

Patience is a virtue that is talked about throughout the Bible in the Old and New Testaments. **Being patient is a vital part of trusting in God as our life circumstances are not always what we would prefer.** However, patience is also a virtue that many people find hard to practice. We tend to want things to happen according to our own timeline. In addition, today’s advances in technology have put almost everything in life at our fingertips. Our meals, entertainment, music, and contacts are instantly available to us. With this capability, it can be very difficult to wait and acquire the virtue of patience. If we become impatient, we will only get in God’s way, and we may even give up on him altogether. But being patient doesn't mean we just sit around and twiddle our thumbs.

Jesus makes it clear in today's Gospel that we have to do our part in order for our lives to bear the fruit he wants them to bear. And one key way to do that is through loving obedience to God's will. This is what St John refers to in the Second Reading (1 John 3:18-24), when he writes: "**Children, let us not love one another in word or in speech, but in truth and action.**" It's easy to say pretty words, to talk the talk of being a good Catholic. But that talk has to translate into action and the strength of virtues, into **honesty, purity, faithfulness, courage, self-sacrifice, and obedience to Church teaching.** Otherwise, we are no better than actors on a stage, making a show but not really following Christ. In one of Charles Schultz's Peanuts comic strip, Linus and Charlie Brown are all bundled up with caps and coats on a snowy, wintry day. They spot Snoopy shivering in the cold. Desiring to comfort him, they walk over and Linus speaks first, "Be of good cheer, Snoopy." Charlie Brown adds, "Yes, be of good cheer." Instead of finding out what's wrong with Snoopy and share the coats, they walk away. Snoopy is left still shivering. A big question mark appears over his puzzled expression. Christian love is to carry us beyond words to deeds. **God has blessed us abundantly to share with those in need.** But sometimes, we need to be patient, to spend time to find out the real need. Not simply cut a cheque or like Linus and Charlie Brown just say good luck and then sit back and be a couch potato doing nothing. **Bishop Paul Terrio just established the Diocese of St. Paul Caritas in the diocesan work of charity and out-reach to those in need (<https://www.dioceseofstpaul.ca/our-diocese/caritas-st-paul>). Being faithful of the Diocese, our role is not just to write a cheque and say a prayer, we also need to volunteer our time to spread the news patiently. In other words, there is still a gap between the kind of Catholic we should be, and the kind of Catholic we actually are.**

In this Year of St. Joseph, let's use him, the **Mirror of Patience** as a model. **St. Joseph exhibited heroic patience throughout his life.** He did not demand to know the full plan laid out step-by-step before God's chosen time. We must imagine he was anxious when he could not find a fitting place for Mary to give birth in or when his family was being hunted. But he patiently awaited the revelation of God's plan, submitting himself completely to God's Providence. We will all experience many trials in life that will test our patience. God allows such trials because he wants us to grow in virtue. A concrete area in our life where we can exercise the virtue of patience is by being merciful to others. While St. Joseph lived with two perfect people, he must have frequently encountered unpleasant and difficult situations and people: employers, co-workers, tax collectors, politicians, etc. We, too, will experience unpleasant situations and people in our life. In such circumstances, imitate the patience of St. Joseph. **Ask God for the grace to love all the people who cross our path.**

As St Vincent de Paul put it: "**The most powerful weapon to conquer the Devil is humility. Let's ask the Holy Spirit to suggest a person or situation where we can exhibit humility and greater patience. Let's ask St Joseph, Mirror of Patience, to teach us how to practically do so. St. Joseph, pray for an increase in the virtue of patience in us. Teach us to love the difficult people in our life, help us to be still in the midst of the storms that come our way, and to trust that our timing is always perfect.**"