

Father Albert Shamon

A Word for Sunday



Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 11:2-11; (R1) Isaiah 35:1-6, 10; (R2) James 5:7-10.

Advent celebrates a time of waiting. Therefore, the Advent virtue is patience. James says, "Be patient" (R2).

Our Lord says to John the Baptizer, "Don't be impatient, for sowing must precede the harvest, the Parousia."

In Revelation, St. John beheld the saints "dressed in long white robes and holding palm branches in their hands" (Revelation 7:9). The palm symbolizes martyrdom, yet all the saints are not martyrs. How is it they all hold palm branches?

Archbishop Sheen used to distinguish two kinds of martyrdom: bloody and dry — one by the sword, the other by patience. Of the two, dry martyrdom is the more difficult, for a bloody death ends all sufferings, but patience bears all sufferings for days, for years, for a lifetime. Such was the martyrdom of Mary, the Queen of Martyrs.

A lad lay dying. As his mother knelt by his bed, stroking his brow, she said, "My dearest child, soon you will be with God. When you are, ask God to give Mother something special, won't you?" The lad nodded. Out of curiosity, the mother said, "What are you going to ask for me?"

The innocent child whispered, "Suffering."

"Suffering?" the mother gulped. Puzzled at her reaction, the little child said, "But mother, didn't Jesus love his mother more than anyone else in the world, and wasn't that what He gave her?"

Did not the author of the Hebrews say, "Whom the Lord loves, He disciplines" (12:6)? Discipline is to perfection what the rod is to upbringing a child. Without it, one is spoiled rotten.

Francis Thompson, in that poetic masterpiece "The Hound of Heaven," glimpsed the purpose of suffering when he asked, "Must Thou char the wood, ere Thou canst limn with it?" He realized that as the artist must reduce the wood to charcoal to draw, so God must purify the soul by trial and suffering to make it a fit instrument for Him to use. That is why "whom the Lord loves he disciplines" — to fit us to receive the love of Him who asks for all our heart.

Yet who likes discipline? So we grumble, "Why, Lord? Why me?" Then afterwards, we feel guilty for complaining.

However, we need not. Read the psalmist and the prophets. All of them complained — but never to men, always to God!

That's the secret: complain to God. Just read Psalms 22 and 73, or Jeremiah 15:10-21. In fact, Jeremiah complained — to God, mind you — so much that the word coined in the English language to denote "always crying the blues" is "jeremiad."

Remember that lovable character in *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevye? He was always complaining — but to God. "Dear God, did you have to make my poor old horse lose his shoe just before the Sabbath?" "So what would have been so terrible if I had a small fortune? If I were a rich man...?"

Whenever you wonder what to pray for or how to pray, just tell God your troubles. He's the complaint department. That's praying!

Did not even Jesus ask on the cross, "Why? ... My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" But Jesus didn't stop there. He went on to make an act of trust: "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

Patience is not passivity; it is highest activity. A drowning man exercises great self-restraint when he ceases thrashing about or grappling with his would-be life-saver and lets himself be towed in to safety.

So the patient person always exercises great control in the midst of trial and suffering, for he utters his complaints only to God and generally ends them in prayer, as the psalmist always did, or in utter abandonment and trust, as did Jesus on the cross.

The message of Advent? "Reform your lives. Stop being so impatient with events, with other people, with yourselves."

We all want things to be done instantly — instant coffee, instant sanctity. But it doesn't work that way. The human heart changes very slowly, and God, who wants that heart, works at the human pace.

As a poet put it: "It takes a lot of slow to grow" — and lots of patience.

Father Paul J. Cuddy

On the Right Side



To a troubled matron

From a troubled matron:

"What is happening to our Catholic faith? Does the Holy Father sanction the new theology? I find I don't feel I'm in the same Church I was brought up with: with clowns running down the aisle giving the peace sign; hymns I heard in Protestant churches; the Blessed Mother relegated to anonymity. It is shocking. I wish Archbishop Lefebvre were here. Many of us feel very alienated."

Reply:

"Your letter came months ago and got mislaid. Much has happened since then, including the Holy See's action about erroneous teaching. Also it would seem that the new bishops being appointed indicate the intention of the pope to save the Church in the United States from the fate of the Church in Holland. Let's take your problems by number.

1) 'What is happening to the faith?' There have always been theological debates from the beginning of the Church. The most insidious was the Arian heresy in the 4th century, which denied the divinity of Christ. The error was condemned by the Council of Nicaea. Though the heresy was in the East, it was Rome with St. Athanasius that safeguarded the purity of doctrine.

2) 'Does the Holy Father sanction the new theology?' The pope sanctions any theology that legitimately develops from traditional Catholic faith. He rejects that which is opposed to it. Do read Cardinal Newman's *Development of Christian Doctrine*, the theme that finally brought him into the Roman Catholic Church in 1845.

3) 'I don't feel I'm in the same Church I was brought up with: clowns running down the aisle giving the peace sign; hymns I heard in Protestant churches; and the Blessed Mother relegated to anonymity.'

a) Frank Sheed wrote a book, *Is it the Same Church?*, noting the aberrations by some restless folks. He noted that despite some accidental changes — for example, meat abstinence and Mass in the vernacular — in essence it is the same Church. A mother in a different dress is not a different mother.

b) Bishop Clark quietly put the quietus on clown Masses. But let's give credit where credit is due. The clown apostolate that brings messages and joy to children and to many people in nursing homes is not to be rejected.

c) The extroverted priest who hits the aisles from the first pew to the last, enthusiastically shaking hands with all, happens to be liturgically incorrect, but that amuses me more than disturbs me. Our diocesan liturgical director, Father Tom Mull, informs me that the celebrating priest should remain in the sanctuary while the people greet one another. A woman I know was angry because Father Aisle-hitter used to kiss the women! I never knew whether she was passed up or if she just thought it indecorous.

d) Protestant hymns: In the fourth century the Church took over pagan temples in Rome and turned them into Catholic churches — for instance, the Pantheon, and Santa Maria sopra Minerva. You would have a more legitimate gripe at the dreadful third-rate music foisted on our helpless congregations, and even more at the suppression of traditional hymns, full of unction, beautiful in text and music.

4) Regarding Archbishop Lefebvre ... This is the saddest of all the break-offs from the Catholic Church. It is like the "Old Catholic Church" that came into being in Germany in 1874, much through the influence of the priest-historian, Dr. Johann Doellinger. Dr. Doellinger never intended to form a separate church, and he never became formally a member of the Old Catholic Church. The Lefebvre people have suffered great pain over some of the changes in the Church since Vatican II. They think that by breaking away from the Church, they are preserving the true Catholic Church. Almost every group that has broken away from the Catholic Church has had the same idea.

"What am I supposed to do, with all these conflicting voices?" a friend asked me.

"Listen to our Holy Father, and you will be right," I replied.

'The Catholic Controversy' to air on WXXI in Rochester

Monsignor Eugene V. Clark and Father Charles E. Curran of Rochester will join host William F. Buckley Jr. on the PBS program "Firing Line" to discuss "The Catholic Controversy."

The clerics will appear on the "Firing Line" scheduled to air on Saturday, December 13, at 2 p.m. on Channel WXXI in Rochester.

Father Curran, who is a professor of moral theology at The Catholic University of America in Washington, was advised by the Vatican last summer that he "is not suitable nor eligible to be a professor of Catholic theology" because his teachings are in conflict with established Church doctrine.

Monsignor Clark is pastor at St. Agnes Church in New York City. He is experienced

in church affairs, having lectured in theology at Fordham University and having served as personal secretary to Cardinals Spellman and Cooke. He is currently professor of Catholic questions at St. John's University in Queens.

Father Curran and Monsignor Clark disagree on the fundamental tenets of the Church. Curran says the church's teaching on morality has changed over the years; Monsignor Clark says this Church teaching has never changed.

Sunday evening prayer service offered at Blessed Sacrament

People of all faiths are invited to a time of reflection and prayer each Sunday evening during Advent at Blessed Sacrament Church, 545 Oxford St., Rochester. Evening prayer will be celebrated at 7 p.m. each Sunday through December 21.

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