

If we understand what patience is, we'll agree that it is a struggle for all of us. What may appear to be patience may in fact be in relation to something we don't care that much about. It's referring to things that arouse our passions or unsettle us. Patience is not a passive state, being indifferent to difficult circumstances... It is more like a state towards which we must strive and struggle precisely because of the intensity of desire or interest in the thing or the circumstance that we're waiting for. It's closely related to fortitude, and in this I often come back to the painting of fortitude by Botticelli. I hope you saw the painting on our website, along with some commentary by Ruskin. I'll make the point again in a different way.

We think of Fortitude as a strong and well composed person, but the painting shows Fortitude to be battle worn, sitting down, perhaps tired. She holds the sword and keeps her eyes open and wary. The virtues, all of them, or more like martial arts than they are mere states of mind. Patience and fortitude are related to hope in a profound way. They are both linked to our movement and change through the ups and downs, the uncertainty and confusion of life.

Why am I talking about this? In contemplating our readings, it seems to me that patience and fortitude are to both readings.

We have the lack of patience in the Israelites which resulted in total calamity and near annihilation. They were waiting for Moses, and they were waiting for the very words of God to be given them which were to guide them and order their individual and collective lives. They got tired of waiting, and took matters into their own hands.

In the Epistle, Paul urges the Corinthians to fortitude in light of the reality and promise of the resurrection. They really wanted to know what life was like after death, and we can gather from Paul's exhortation, that perhaps some were wondering whether the suffering of being regarded as strange in their society was worth it.

Friends, I needn't spell out for you how our patience, fortitude, and hope are being tested in these historically significant and difficult times... If we waiver in our hope of God's purposes for us and his providential care for the world, we may easily slip into the sort of doubt and confusion which the Israelites fell into. COVID-19 and its manifold effect isn't the only calamity going on in the world. Today is Sanctity of Life Sunday, and it's worth noting that across the age range, from the youngest to the oldest, human beings who are not obviously 'contributing' to our lives are being treated as burdens from which we can and should be freed. Or, in many cases, people who are no longer as "productive" or independent as they once were are made to feel burdensome.

In our current circumstances, with COVID-19, with general social changes, with economic uncertainty, I think we may be tempted to two different sorts responses.

The first temptation may be to willfulness, even disobedience in how we live our lives for and towards the Lord because we get tired of waiting and lose faith. We don't have the structures of typical community engagement, and these structures are important and basic parts of our life. We are waiting. In the meantime, let us not lose a grip on our hearts, minds, and conduct while we wait. This is what happened to the Israelites, and we see how that ended. Some people are struggling with negative or even carnal predispositions which were held in check by routine and so forth. So, keeping fortitude in mind, we need to be on guard, and to take up the fight if we are being assaulted by this temptation. Like any battle there will be ups and downs, but what we don't want to do is to close our eyes, or put the sword on the floor.

The second temptation is to forget that our orientation is not to be for and towards the things of this world. Rather, through the various circumstances creaturely realities and changes, we are to be oriented towards our Lord and his accomplished work. Like the Corinthian Christians, we too in the late

modern west are quite focused upon what we regard as outcomes, a return on our investment, a worthy payoff for the effort we make in relation to whatever. Our lives need to have a point. They do have a point. However, it is not in the appearance of success and failure in this life in which the assessment is made. We look towards Jesus. The humble things in this life, the things we regard as being of little or no consequence, perhaps even those things which the world regards as being failure, in the final analysis may be the very things which the Lord commends us.

“Therefore,” as the Apostle tells us, “my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.”

Let us pray...

Questions for discussion or reflection:

- 1) Consider how your patience and fortitude are being tested during this time.
- 2) Are you being tempted to make some kind of golden calf or take matters into your own hands in some inordinate way?
- 3) In our current circumstances, what is 'the work of the Lord' for us?