

Incorporating Patience Into our Lives

Each year around Christmas, the film “A Christmas Story” airs. While made in the 80s, it takes place in the late 1940s and tells the story of a young boy wanting the best Christmas present ever, a Red Rider Beebe Shot Gun. Every time he requests it though, he’s told reasons for it not coming, the main one being he would likely shoot his eye out. Another sub plot of the movie is how he longs for the Orphan Annie decoder ring he sent for in the mail so he can decode the secret message. Day after day he goes to the mail box only to be disappointed until the great day it arrives. He rushes up to the bathroom and locks the door to decode the message he heard on the radio show, convinced there’s something urgent to know, when the message is simply “Drink Your Ovaltine.”

It’s a great movie, and I think illustrates something that I know for a fact is something I’ve always struggled with, which is patience. In today’s world especially where we can get things quickly, waiting for things I find to be very difficult. But sometimes when we do wait things out some incredibly good things can come of it.

This past Thursday, we honored Saint John Neumann. He comes from Bohemia, which was part of the Austrian Empire at the time. He attended seminary and also studied at the University of Prague, and was looking forward to serving as a priest when he ran into a problem: the bishop felt there were too many priests in Bohemia, so he told him to wait. Eventually he came to America, where there was a need for priests, and gets sent to work with German immigrants in mission churches in the Niagara Falls area, where he visits the sick, teaches catechism, and trains teachers to take over for him when he leaves. He eventually applies to the Redemptorists and becomes the first candidate in the United States. He then works for six years in Ohio, Pennsylvania and Maryland before becoming the Provincial Superior, and a US Citizen. However, Rome has more work for him to do. He becomes a bishop in Baltimore, and then bishop of Philadelphia. Appropriately his feast follows Saint Elizabeth Seton, because he was the first to start a diocesan school system, taking the Catholic Schools in Philadelphia from one to a hundred. Because he spoke both German and Italian, he could minister to different people, but still there were problems for him. The Know Nothings, an anti-Catholic party at the time, were causing a lot of problems for immigrants and Catholics, and they burned convents and even schools. Neumann at this point became frustrated, and wrote Rome asking to move but the pope wrote back saying he had more work to do, which he did for six more years until he died of a stroke on a city street on January 5, 1860. When you look at his life, like the lives of so many saints, it involved a number of struggles and moments where I’m sure he was frustrated with a situation. But because he never backed down he was able to help so many people and change this world for the better.

Jesus is much the same way. Our Christmas Season ends with the Baptism of the Lord tomorrow and Jesus beginning His mission. But throughout His ministry, while at any moment He can reveal who He is, He knows that dazzle was not what His father wanted; instead He served day in and day out and in so many ways exhibited patience: from growing up in the home with Mary and Joseph and sitting at Temple each week, even though He was smarter than all of the rabbis put together; to being patient with the apostles to the people who listened to Him. Even at His death, He dies a seeming failure, with no one left – but because He trusts in the will of the Father and sees past the current moment, the world is redeemed.

Practically speaking, in this world where we are used to getting things instantly, patience is

tough. Wouldn't it be nice to sign up for "Amazon Prime" and have it apply to people who we want to change, a family situation to be resolved, weight loss to happen within 48 hours, or finances to suddenly change. This doesn't happen. But there are some things we can do.

One, with respect to ourselves and others, know that change takes time. Maybe you are setting out to better yourself spiritually this year, or get healthier. Maybe you are hoping that loved one will make some changes to the decisions they make in life, or find their faith again. Don't give up. Keep at it. Keep praying. Keep taking the steps you need to better your health. Keep being involved in their lives.

Second, pray. God is with us every step of the way. When we say "yes" to the mission, there are inevitable hardships. But God will always be there to give us strength.

Third, know there are setbacks. We often take a step back, or go through a valley. Don't lose sight of the long-term goal. Much like a World Champion baseball team still loses plenty of games during the season, so it is with us as we strive for excellence.

Fourth, make a concerted effort to be patient with others. Show courtesy on the road; don't vent at the telemarketer who calls you who is just doing their job to make ends meet; show tolerance for people with differing views; show patience to people working retail or at restaurants. A little bit of patience can speak volumes and do so much to lift one's morale.

Lastly, don't give up on the world. As we begin ordinary time this week, we think about how as Christians we go out into the world and live our lives as people of hope; as people who make a difference in this world. It can be so easy to be cynical when we see the state of affairs in the world; what people do to one another; or how so many hold views that are contrary to what we believe, or perceive happiness as something very different from what true happiness is. John Neumann helped educate others and planted the seeds for that Catholic education and the Catholic faith to flourish by not running away from his mission. Neither can we as we go out into the world.

Part of me will always be a clock watcher and want things immediately, but I know that given time, some very good things in our lives can happen - so let's strive to grow in patience to help the mustard seeds God plants bloom.

God's blessings to you,

Fr. Paul