

Patience and the *Parousia*
(3rd Sunday of Advent, Year A)

James 5:7-10—The Coming of the Lord is at Hand

Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until it receives the early and the late rain. *You also be patient.* Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. *Do not grumble, brethren, against one another,* that you may not be judged; behold, *the Judge is standing at the doors.* As an example of *suffering* and *patience*, brethren, *take the prophets* who spoke in the name of the Lord. (James 5:7-10)

1. Context: written to Jewish Christians (cf. James 1:1)
 - a. Audience: struggling with impatience regarding
 - b. Eschatology: the “coming” (Greek *parousia*; Latin *adventus*) of “the Lord”
2. Patience: “patient” or “forbearance” (Greek *makrothymeō*) (5:7)
 - a. Definition: “state of remaining tranquil while awaiting an outcome”¹
 - b. Patience: first definition of love given by Paul!

Love is patient (Greek *agapē makrothymeī*) and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude (1 Cor 13:4-5)

3. Example #1: Farmer: waits with “patience” for the fruit of the earth (5:7)
4. Complaining: the opposite of patience
 - a. Do not “grumble” or “complain” (Greek *stenazō*) (5:9)
 - b. Judgment: the Judge is “standing at the doors” (cf. Matt 7:1; 24:33)
6. Example #2: The Prophets: waited for God for *centuries!* (5:10)

The Living Tradition and the Liturgy

Bede the Venerable (8th cent.): If [the farmer] labors so patiently for the fruit of the land which he waits for and hopes in time will come forth, how much more ought you to hold up under all adversities now for the fruit of the heavenly reward which you can possess forever? For indeed you will receive the fruit in time, the life, namely of the soul after death; you will also receive later on at the judgment the incorruption of your flesh, or at least the early in the works of righteousness, the late in the reward of your labors according to the saying of the apostle, “You have your fruit in sanctification, the end, in fact, eternal life” (Rom 6:22). (Bede the Venerable, *Commentary on James 5:7*; trans. D. Hurst)

Francis de Sales: Do not limit your patience to this or that kind kind of injury and affliction. Extend it universally to all those God will send you or let happen to you...

¹ F. W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 612.

Complain as little as possible about the wrongs you suffer. Undoubtedly a person who complains commits a sin by doing so, since self-love always feels the injuries worse than they really are. Above all, do not complain to irascible or fault-finding persons. If there is just occasion for complaining to someone either to correct an offense or restore your peace of mind, do so to those who are even-tempered and really love God. Instead of calming your mind the others will stir up worse difficulties and in place of pulling out the thorn that is hurting you they will drive it deeper into your foot. (Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 3.3; trans. J. K. Ryan).

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (3rd Sunday of Advent, Year A)

1. What are some practical ways to live out the kind of “patience” that James is calling for Christians to have as we wait for “the coming of the Lord”?

For Further Reading

1. Bede the Venerable. *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*. Translated by Dom David Hurst, O.S.B. Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian, 1985.