Waiting Patiently with Mary and Joseph

Part of a series based on Pope John Paul II's call to celebrate the Great Jubilee Year 2000.

by Fr. Tom Forrest, CSsR

Surprisingly, losing our patience can prove more costly than losing our money or even our health. Impatience can deprive us of peace of heart and cost us the loss of valued friendships as well. It can also destroy our trust in God, the greatest loss of all.

In modern culture where self-gratification and technology are paired together like the sprinter and the starting gun, speed becomes the ultimate goal. With a cellular phone in hand, some of us can't even wait to cross the street or park the car or leave the restaurant before giving someone an urgent ring. When Speedy Gonzalez becomes patron saint of our actions and every reaction, we end up impatient with ourselves, with others, and even with God Himself.

Patience is a talent for waiting and for staying calm as we do so. Like the virtue of modesty, it is fast becoming one of the lost arts of our modern world. Coffee and packaged dinners have to be instantaneous. Mail needs to be sent express or over the Internet, with no time given even for punctuation.

The results are disastrous when our high-speed culture makes us impatient with God. I remember being visited by a man when I was working in Puerto Rico. He told me about a vision he experienced. Not every story of visions has impressed me, but this one did!

The man saw an angel guarding what appeared to be a great treasury vault in heaven. Piled high in the room were spectacular packages obviously containing special gifts, one more beautiful than the other. The angel explained that each of the packages held an important blessing that persons on earth had asked of God. The Heavenly Father granted the requests as soon as they were made, but commissioned His angels to deliver the packages on the day and at the hour He determined.

PHOTO: "HOLY FAMILY" STATUE BY PAUL ROCHELEAU

> *"Impatience can deprive us of peace of heart and cost us the loss of friendships."*

Before the day and hour arrived, though, many of the petitioners could wait no longer, and noisily declared that God didn't hear their prayers. So the blessings were never delivered, and that was what the gentleman saw stacked high in the treasury room.

God is beyond time, so He doesn't wear a watch. We are quickly heading for big losses once we start clocking the God of Eternity on our tiny stop-watches of human impatience. As the Sovereign Lord of All Creation, He has every right to tell us to stop rushing Him and to give Him a chance to function fully as our Lord and King.

As our wise and loving Heavenly Father, He also decides whether or not we are bringing Him a true need or asking only for the gratification of a whim. His promise is to respond to our needs (see Eph 4:19), not to our every whim (see Jas 4:3). Even when it is a true need, though, He remains our sovereign Lord, responding as He sees fit by giving us what we need or by transforming us in a way that makes the need disappear (see Mt 26: 42; 2 Cor 12:7-9). In either case, our prayer is answered!

Last September, I had to take a long and complicated trip to Kazakhstan, formerly a part of the Soviet Union. Despite the fact that I had everyone praying for me to make all of my tight connections, everything seemed to go wrong, tempting me to conclude that God wasn't listening.

Because of the long delays and canceled flights, the trip took no less than 50 hours to negotiate. But the airlines gave me comfortable hotel rooms in both Chicago and London. In fact, the plane from London to Kazakhstan was so empty that I had a row of four seats to myself and slept most of the way. So, I arrived well rested and ready to go — only two hours late for the conference I was scheduled to give.

God heard all the prayers, but in His way, not mine! I was learning that when things seem to be going all wrong, they may actually be going just right, because God has taken over the controls.

Mary, together with her gentle companion, Joseph, is our best model next to Jesus for every virtue — including how to stay patient and let God take the controls. She was called by God to commit herself to a life of virginity, and then waited patiently to find out why. She waited calmly for the Father to send an angel to explain to Joseph the reason for her surprising condition.

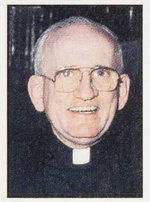
Serenely and with Joseph's support, she waited nine months for her Divine Son to arrive. Without being troubled, she waited as Joseph hunted all over Bethlehem for a place for her to give birth. Through three years of exile in Egypt, she and Joseph awaited word from an angel announcing that it was finally safe to return home. For three days, they waited prayerfully before finding Jesus in the temple. Throughout Christ's life, Mary waited with courage for the sword that would pierce her heart.

> *"We need to stay patient and let God take the controls."*

In our hectic modern world, we are too often like little children waiting anxiously on Christmas Eve, too nervous and excited to sleep. This year, we are awaiting the most extraordinary Christmas we will ever experience, *Christmas Day of the Great Jubilee Year 2000.* We are not waiting for an imaginary Santa to bring us new toys of self-gratification. We are waiting to celebrate and be transformed by the coming of Christ — the only salvific event that can open us to the sight of God and an eternity of joy. Without any doubt, the best way to make it all happen is by waiting patiently and expectantly *with Mary and Joseph.*

Not one of our needed blessings will ever be lost in that great vault of undelivered favors, if only we learn from Mary and Joseph this simple lesson of waiting patiently. We will have guaranteed for ourselves the greatest Christmas gifts we will ever receive. ✝

Fr. Tom Forrest, CSsR, is Director of EVANGELIZATION 2000, which is helping to focus world attention on Jesus during the Great Jubilee Year 2000. A prominent speaker and writer on Christian renewal, he currently resides in Washington, D.C.



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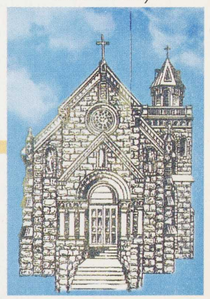

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