

May 4, 2008

It is May, the month normally devoted to the Blessed Mother, and by a happy coincidence she is featured in the first reading today. She is among the first disciples who have experienced Jesus' ascension and have now returned to the city to pray and await the coming of the Holy Spirit. She gave birth to him; she remained by him in his suffering and death; now she waits again, this time for something entirely new, the coming of the Holy Spirit.

When we look at the little evidence the Scriptures provide us about Mary, the Mother of Jesus, we could say that what it gives us could all be summed up as a kind of waiting. She first appears in Luke's Gospel as going to her cousin Elizabeth to wait with her for the birth of her child. Then she waits for the birth of her own child. If we use our imaginations, we can imagine her waiting to see if she will make it to Bethlehem before the baby is born. Again, using our imagination, we can see her waiting in Egypt for the day when she and her husband and child can return to their own land. We see her waiting to see if the twelve year has been found, and afterwards she waits to understand what his words ("I must be about my Father's business") which seem so unfeeling might mean.

At the wedding feast at Cana she waits to see what he will do after she has made known to him that the wine has run out. Later, when he has become famous, she waits on the edge of the crowd to see how he will respond to her request to speak to him. Then she appears at the foot of the cross, waiting for him to die, no doubt praying that it would be sooner rather than later since he is in such agony. In Luke 2, 19 we are told that “Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.” She was a reflective, a waiting person.

Our word patience comes from the Latin word patior which means to suffer. To wait for someone or something is to be patient, and to be patient is a kind of suffering, because we are not in control of the situation or the person. We have to wait upon them, and in that sense we suffer them.

Our lives are a waiting game. What else can they be since we are creatures of time. We are always waiting and therefore always in some sense practicing patience, and in that sense we are always suffering, for we are not in control.

Often the temptation for us is to rush, that is, not to be patient. We force the future. When we do that, things usually go wrong. Our timing is off. It is like not waiting for a meal to cook or a flower to bloom. We have to learn to be patient. We have to learn to wait. We have to learn to suffer. When young people are in a hurry, we chalk that up to inexperience. They don't know that things must mature slowly. But what about us who are older? It is pretty foolish, yes, even funny, when we older folks are in a hurry. And that is true even though some would claim that since our time is short, we have to hurry. Certainly, we should not be lazy. On the other hand, we should have learned by now that things mature slowly. That is part of experience and the wisdom which should come with experience.

In the end, waiting, being patient, suffering reality to mature, is the stance of the believer, for the believer is one who knows that ultimately he is not in charge, that ultimately it is God who is in charge. And when we accept that fact, we can live peacefully and patiently. We can wait. We can suffer the hand of the Lord upon us directing our lives.

As we celebrate this month of May dedicated to Mary, let us ask her to teach us how to live in faith and trust, how to wait upon God

as he acts in our lives, how to be patient and to suffer ourselves to be cared for by her son's wisdom and love for us. Yes, we must be decisive. Yes, we must act. Yes, we must be resolute. But we must be all this after having bided our time, after having waited upon the Lord, after having opened our hands and hearts to God, after having been patient and suffering. We might pray to the lady who waited so patiently upon her son: Loving Mother, teach us to care and not to care, teach us to sit still, teach us to be patient and to wait, teach us to suffer your son's will.