

Father John Catoir

# The World of Waiting

The question has often been asked, "What makes saints saints?" One person gave this simple explanation:

Because they were cheerful when it was difficult to be cheerful;

Patient when it was difficult to be patient;

Because they pushed forward when they wanted to stand still;

They kept silent when they wanted to talk;

They were agreeable when they wanted to be disagreeable.

That was all. It was quite simple and always will be.

What struck me in that beautiful piece was the importance of the passive virtues: restraint, patience, silence. Then I remembered St. Paul's famous commentary on love. Love, or charity, is the essence of Christian perfection, and he summed it up beautifully:

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Cor. 13:4-7)



How much of your life is filled with waiting, enduring, holding back? Most of us do a lot of this as a matter of routine. It doesn't seem especially meritorious or sanctifying, but apparently it is. I think of so many good people who suffer the humiliation of being taken for granted, being used, even unintentionally, by the people they love. They endure these things because they are holy.

John Milton, in his sonnet on blindness, wrote these famous words: "They also serve who only stand and wait." The service of love is very often a kind of waiting.

God waits. The world He made is filled with waiting. Waiting is one of the primary laws of nature. Winter waits for spring. Buds wait for warmth. The earth waits for rain. Nothing in life comes to instant maturity. The value of waiting is far superior to a mindless activism. All things begin as a tiny seed, waiting to grow to full stature.

Dante described hope as "a waiting with certitude." There is an ultimate meaning to all our waiting. Pray for the grace to wait with an openness to the Holy Spirit. Sometimes it is in silence that we learn to reach the depths of our own being. Sometimes doing nothing can be the greatest service. Just being there when you want to run away could be the holiest thing you'll ever do.