

Along the track

The Kookaburra

The Kookaburra sits very quietly watching. He has been coming every day for weeks, always about the same time. He sits and watches and waits. He is a model of patience. I wonder, do the fish in the pond know that he is watching and waiting? He got the last lot so we replaced them and put netting over the pond. And he sits and watches and calculates.

Have you noticed the growing number of signs in hospitals and surgeries, in waiting rooms and supermarkets warning that antisocial behaviour will not be tolerated. That usually comes with impatience, putting myself ahead of others, thinking I am more important, I deserve better. That leads to frustration and anger. We may not think that our impatience stems from that, but it does – it is not just a product of the seemingly inefficient service at the desk. Road rage is on the increase, at times with terrible consequences. We can be awfully restless, demanding of others, frustrated. We can look around for someone to blame – anyone and, sadly we can take it out on them. That can lead us to be less responsible and less respectful. None of that helps. In the end, it is patience that usually wins.

There is a lot of patient waiting in Scripture – from Abraham to the prophets, to John the Baptist, they all waited patiently on the Lord. And he eventually came. They all learned the lesson that we can't hear much when we are rushing, when we are impatient. Our minds are elsewhere. Every one of us needs some time when we are patient, and wait, and listen. Just like the prophets, John the Baptist, Paul and James and so many others, we usually find the voice of God in the quiet, when we are patient and wait and we become more sensitive to the many ways God speaks to us. St Benedict wrote that it takes patience to come to know God. We must give ourselves a lifetime to do it.

Some years ago my wife and I visited Ephesus in Turkey. We stayed in the town next door, Selcuk. Over those few days we watched a woman weaving a carpet. She could only work for three hours a day, such was the intricacy of the work and because of the strain on her eyesight and her fingers. She had been doing this for over twenty years and over those few days we could see a beautiful work of art emerging. It was fascinating to watch her dedication and her craft and, above all her patience which made it all happen!

Sometimes it is worth asking, are there times when I care more about getting tasks done than the people doing them? When are the times when I give in to my frustration and irritation. Who did I blame? Today, did I make some situation better or did I ruin it with my impatience. Did I really listen when someone came to talk to me today, to tell me something or was I impatient, wanting to get on with what I wanted to do? Or did I make someone feel better about themselves today? At the end of my day, am I a better person than I was when I got up this morning – have I left the world a little better for my presence, my interactions, what I did today? Did I bring a bit of joy and kindness into the world today or was I an impatient grump?

The book of Proverbs offers this wisdom: “Hot tempers cause arguments, but patience brings peace.” Proverbs 15:18

I saw this sign displayed on a dentist's window:

A smile costs nothing but it gives much, it enriches those who receive it without making poorer those who give.

It takes but a moment, but the memory of it sometimes lasts forever. It brings rest to the weary, cheers the discouraged sunshine to the sad and it is nature's best antidote to trouble.

It is something of no value to anyone until it is given away.

Some people are too tired to give you a smile. Give them one of yours as no one needs a smile so much as one who has no more to give.

So what? Have you noticed that impatient people don't smile a lot!

In case you are wondering, the kookaburra is still here. And so are the fish.

Regards
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