

Well, the wait is almost over. Thank Goodness! Who wants to wait? And why would you? I've never found anyone who likes to wait. Did you ever wonder why? Why is it so hard to wait? You might think it's obvious when you have something wonderful to look forward to... like Christmas. My son Sam is a perfect example. He's going to be married in a couple weeks. He and his fiancée are certainly sick of waiting. But it's not just when there is something spectacular approaching. It's no easier when it's the opposite.

I remember as a kid, in our neighborhood anyway, if you did something *really bad*, you would likely hear the words, "Wait until your father gets home." Trust me, the waiting was painful and the closer the time of reckoning came, the worse it seemed.

In fact, waiting is hard even if you don't know how things will turn out. Think of waiting for your college test scores, whether you will get accepted into the school of your choice or get the job you want. Did you pass your exam or make the varsity squad? Or how

about the agony of waiting on the results of a serious medical test or diagnosis? No fun. So, the frustration we have with waiting has little to do with the end result. It's just that we are *impatient*. The English dictionary defines impatience as irritability or restlessness. But the Catholic (Latin) definition states it is the *unwillingness* to suffer.

Our culture tells us to flee from suffering. But the Church says no. We put it in our calendar as liturgical seasons, Advent and Lent, before the two biggest holy days of the year: Christmas and Easter. Why? Because a little self-imposed suffering *actually* does us good. It helps us with our discipline and our focus. Besides, wasn't that part of the reason Jesus came to us: His "willingness to suffer" for us. When you think about it, the "willingness to suffer" for another is a pretty good definition of *love*. Yes, we are at first attracted to others because they make us feel good. But, when you commit to loving another, you commit to *being* present and suffering *with* and *for* the other, if necessary.

At the beginning of today's gospel passage from Matthew, I think it's safe to say, Joseph was probably impatient (for all the best reasons) while waiting to complete his marriage to Mary. That is, until he found out she was going to have a baby that was not his. Now such a thing does, on occasion, happen today. But I guarantee you, the husband-to-be is not likely to act as Joseph did. You can imagine the anger, and accusations, and vitriol that would be directed to the woman from the fiancé and his family and friends. Probably not a lot different in Joseph's day, except, then you could throw stones as well as insults. But as we know, remarkably, Joseph didn't react this way. He still cared so much for Mary that he wanted to shield her from the shaming and embarrassment as much as possible. Remember, this is Joseph before the dream. He was willing to protect her. But, he must have been feeling so hurt and betrayed. His dream of a life with Mary was, well, looking hopeless.

But the angel, in the dream, said no. It's not at all as it appears.

What appears as a hopelessly painful situation is, in fact, the plan of God.

Actually, it is God. And the waiting is about to be over, not just for Joseph and Mary, but for the people of God, who need a Savior. Someone who comes to them, suffers with them, and then for them. All so the hopeless can have hope, the suffering can find consolation, the sinner, mercy, and the sorrowful, joy. So, rejoice! Our hope, the hope of all mankind, arrived in our midst as foretold by the prophets. Born of a virgin, Emmanuel: God with us.

And that, by the way, is the theme of the Gospel of Matthew (stated here in the very first chapter). Let's remember that throughout this liturgical year. Oh, and guess what we'll hear in the very last verse of the Gospel, read five months from now, on the feast of the Ascension? We'll hear Jesus saying, "Behold, I am with you always, *until the end ...*"

I don't know about you, but I'm running out of patience. And I can imagine Mary, nine months pregnant, traveling up and down mountain passes for 100 miles on the back of a donkey feeling the very same way and thinking, "Let's get this baby over with... literally".

# Come Lord Jesus, come!