

Third Sunday of Advent, December 14th, 2025

John Orlock

Be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. You must be patient.

May the Holy Spirit descend to inspire our hearts and imagination.

Across the next several minutes, I'd like to remind you – bring back to your thoughts – the value of something you already know.

And as a way to do that, we'll talk about an Irish playwright, we'll talk about how the word "patience" entered the English language, we'll talk about St. Paul, a reel-to-reel tape recorder, a person who made a difference in your life, the check-out line at Heinen's, and the remaining eleven days of Advent.

The Irish playwright? Samuel Beckett.

In the 1950s, Beckett was a middle-aged struggling Irish novelist, living in Paris. In 1954, however, he writes a play in French) "Waiting for Godot" – arguably the most enigmatic and significant English-language play of the 20th century, and one that will -- within 15 years, in 1969 -- bring Beckett the Nobel Prize for Literature.

The plot involves two friends, middle-aged homeless men on a barren dirt country road, as they wait to keep an appointment with a Mr. Godot, who they've never met. And don't even know why they're supposed to meet with him. But were instructed to wait, wait at a certain spot. Or there'd be severe consequences.

The play proved radical because the main dramatic action of the play is waiting.

Beckett suggests that the primary action of Life is waiting.

Waiting. We're about it every day, aren't we. Our days are filled with waiting.

Most of us most of the time do more waiting than we do anything else.

Waiting for the alarm to go off in the morning

Waiting for the kids to get ready for school

Waiting in line at Starbucks where we wait along with others who are waiting.

Waiting until we're old enough to.... (fill in the blank)

Waiting until our kids are old enough.... (fill in the blank)

Waiting to go on vacation.

Waiting to retire.

Waiting for Christmas to come

Waiting for Christmas to be over

Waiting to fall in love.

Waiting for a special person to be in love with us again.

Waiting is at the very core of the human condition. That's a pretty harsh reality. But there's an upside here. Waiting can lead to Grace.

In the midst of waiting, we can make the choice of Patience. It's a choice that offers the opportunity for moment of grace in our lives.

In waiting, we're stuck in a stalled state of being. Patience lifts us out of that. Patience is one of the most positive energies of the human spirit. The word patience derives from the Latin verb *patire* (to suffer, endure) or from the Latin noun *passio*. Two of the many words that come from the root *passio* – The word “passion”: (suffering), originally intense emotion or endurance. And then of course there's the noun “patient”, in medical terms.

Patient: The one who is suffering. In the King James version of the Old Testament, the adjective “patient” appears 5 times. And its meaning is to endure a trial or tribulation. to suffer through it, to gut it out.

By contrast, “patient” appears far more often in the New Testament: we find it 19 times across Gospels, including in today's text from James, and takes on a much different tone. We're all familiar with what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians.: *“Love is patient, and is kind”*.

In the New Testament, the quality of love is directly connected to patience.

Examples of Christ's love and patience are seen perhaps most clearly during Jesus's interactions with His disciples. We see Him repeatedly frustrated by their inability to understand much of what he's teaching, yet He graciously explains the meanings of parables when they miss the point over and over. He endures the disciples' slowness, and ambition, even when —if you recall -- James and John are jockeying for the best seats in Paradise, and their mother joins in to petition Jesus for their preferential treatment: Jesus turns it into a teaching moment about how the last shall be first. Time and again, the patience of Christ – with the help of the Holy Spirit -- rises above the annoyance of Christ. The patience of Christ, in fact, is what taught and transformed these often confused, ragged fishermen into the spiritual force of early Christianity.

Yet, in many respects, impatience is our instinctive condition. It's the unfortunate default aspect of our behavior. But going against this default can produce a wonderful gift.

My father wasn't a patient man: he was short-tempered with a wide-ranging cynicism. My Dad was a secular Scrooge. He was an engineer for Philco, in the early days of television. A stressful job. But he was a hard-working provider for his wife and five kids, although he was neither overtly affectionate nor religious.

He was a skilled family photographer, who built a dark room in our basement. And one year, he gets this idea beyond the visual. Audio. Something new: a state-of-the-art Wollensak reel-to reel tape recorder. His plan is to capture and preserve the immediacy of his kids on Christmas morning dashing down the stairs, diving into chaotic surprise & delight of those first moments searching out and

opening presents. The ephemeral laughter of his family on this Christmas would be ever held on tape through the years.

I'm sure he had explained all of this to my mother and how she in her way could help with the staging. I'm 10, my twin brothers 9, my sisters 6 and 2: all of us waiting for Santa Claus. It's now, late Christmas Eve. Long after my parents are back from midnight mass – long after we're upstairs tucked away asleep – my Dad's downstairs in the living room, setting up, microphones carefully positioned. Tape threaded, on pause. Everything poised at the ready. Perfect.

Early Christmas morning. Five of us, up and eager. Tumbling down the stairs.

Ready! He presses the record button. The reels start to turn... then stop!

Oh no!

One of his kids knocked the plug out of the socket way behind the tree.

Oh no... The high-pitched delight of the Orlocks' Christmas morning chatters on.

But it's not being saved.

And a half hour later. I remember my Dad – this cynical, short-tempered man – after all that preparation and anticipation, sitting in his living room chair with an uncharacteristic patient acceptance, figuring out what went bust, and how to get the Christmas recording right next year.

Well next year: the microphones are in the wrong place and the only sounds he gets are the rustle of wrapping paper being ripped open.

And then the next year: one of the kids erases the tape by mistake.

Although he tried the recording for two more Christmases, nothing.

But he never got angry, never let his frustration push into his family's chaotic celebration on this special morning.

Making the choice to be patient isn't always easy, you know that. It's not something that for most of us comes automatically. It requires practice. Awareness. It requires a moment of asking for help from the Holy Spirit.

We have 11 days of Advent remaining. I encourage you to shift the focus inward.

Who were the people in your life who were patient with you, perhaps when you needed it the most? A parent? Teacher? Boss? Coach? Who?

Remember. It may not come right away. Keep going. Try to remember a person each day. Pull back that moment. Thank them. It's never too late.

Patient with others.

You're in the check-out line at the crowded grocery store, someone in front of you is fumbling in their purse for exact change, taking forever.

You're in a line of traffic, and you let another driver in the line before you.

Patience is Gracious. A gift.

And so, to return to the top,

We know the value ...

But we forget to be patient. We're distracted. Tired.

Practice. Take the time.

In the moments of stress and annoyance that inevitably are there in these eleven remaining days of Advent,

Let's... Let's push past the default.

Let's ask the for the grace.

Remember what you already know.

Look about. And give the gift.

Seventy years later, my Dad's gift of Christmas patience is what lingers in my heart this Advent season. I'd be hard-pressed to list memorable presents under the tree through the years.

But this one is easy to pull up.

Amen.