

Pope: Patience is a hallmark of consecrated men and women

Pope Francis celebrates a Vigil Mass on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, which is observed as the World Day of Consecrated Life. In his homily, the Pope invites religious men and women to be patient and courageous in order to keep advancing, exploring new paths, and responding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.



At the Mass for the Presentation of the Lord, Pope Francis focused on the words of Simeon when he “looked forward to the consolation of Israel” (Lk 2:25).

He introduced his homily describing Simeon who recognized in the Child Jesus “the light that came to shine on the Gentiles:” He was an elderly man, the Pope explained, who had patiently awaited the fulfilment of the Lord’s promises.

The patience of Simeon

“Let us take a closer look at Simeon’s patience,” the Pope said, “For his entire life, he had been waiting, exercising the patience of the heart.” He noted that “Simeon had learned that God does not come in extraordinary events, but works amid the apparent monotony of our daily life, in the frequently dull rhythm of our activities, in the little things that, working with tenacity and humility, we achieve in our efforts to do his will.”

Simeon, the Pope continued, did not grow weary although in his long life there had surely been hurtful and difficult times, but he did not lose hope: “the flame still burned brightly in his heart.” By trusting in the Lord’s promise, Pope Francis explained, he did not let himself be consumed by regret or by the sense of despondency that can come as we approach the twilight of our lives.

“His hope and expectation found expression in the daily patience of a man who, despite everything, remained watchful, until at last ‘his eyes saw the salvation’ that had been promised,” he said.

A mirror of God’s own patience

The Pope went on to observe that Simeon’s patience was a mirror of God’s own patience. In fact, from prayer and the history of his people, Simeon had learnt to see in the Lord “a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in

steadfast love and fidelity.” He reflected on the letter of Saint Paul to the Romans in which the apostle says that patience “leads us to repentance,” and quoting from the German priest, author and academic, Romano Guardini, who once observed that patience is God’s way of responding to our weakness and giving us the time we need to change, the Pope said that “More than anyone else, the Messiah, Jesus, whom Simeon held in his arms, shows us the patience of God, the merciful Father who keeps calling us, even to our final hour.” God, Pope Francis reiterated, does not demand perfection, but always opens up new possibilities when all seems lost, in the wish to open a breach in our hardened hearts.

God never tires of waiting for us

“This is the reason for our hope: that God never tires of waiting for us,” the Pope said, adding that “when we turn away, he comes looking for us; when we fall, he lifts us to our feet; when we return to him after losing our way, he waits for us with open arms. His love is not weighed in the balance of our human calculations, but unstintingly gives us the courage to start anew.”

Our patience

Pope Francis then invited consecrated men and women to look to the patience of God and the patience of Simeon as they consider their own lives of consecration. Patience, he said, is not simply about tolerating difficulties or showing grim determination in the face of hardship, “it’s not a sign of weakness, but the strength of spirit that enables us to ‘carry the burden’ of personal and community problems, to accept others as different from ourselves, to persevere in goodness when all seems lost, and to keep advancing even when overcome by fatigue and listlessness.”

He pointed to what he called three “settings” in which patience can become concrete:

1. Personal life

Our personal life, in which the way we have responded to the Lord’s call has not always been constant because of disappointments, frustrations and feelings of powerlessness. “In our lives as consecrated men and women, it can happen that hope slowly fades as a result of unmet expectations. We have to be patient with ourselves and await in hope God’s own times and places, for he remains ever faithful to his promises. Remembering this can help us retrace our steps and revive our dreams, rather than yielding to interior sadness and discouragement,” he said. “Brothers and sisters,” the Pope exhorted, “inner sadness in us consecrated persons is like a worm: a worm, eating us from within. Flee from innersadness!”

2. Community life

A second setting in which patience can become concrete, the Pope continued, is community life. He said that human relationships are not always serene, especially when they involve sharing a project of life or apostolic activity: There are times when conflicts arise and no immediate solution can be expected, nor should hasty judgements be made. Time, the Pope said, is required to step back, to preserve peace and to wait for a better time to resolve situations in charity and in truth, and he urged men and women who live in communities to cultivate this kind of reciprocal patience: “the ability to support, that is, to bear on our own shoulders, the life of one of our brothers or sisters, including his or her weaknesses and failings.”

“Let us keep in mind that the Lord does not call us to be soloists,” and there are many of those in the Church he said, He calls us “to be part of a choir that can sometimes miss a note or two, but must always try to sing in unison.”

3. Our relationship with the world

The third setting described by Pope Francis concerns our relationship with the world. Recalling how Simeon and Anna cherished the hope proclaimed by the prophets, “even though it is slow to be fulfilled and grows silently amid the infidelities and ruins of our world.”

He said “they did not complain about how wrong things are, but patiently looked for the light shining in the darkness of history,” and stressed that “we too need that kind of patience, so as not to fall into the trap of lamenting that ‘the world no longer listens to us’, or ‘we have no more vocations’, ‘these are not easy times’... “ “It can happen that even as God patiently tills the soil of history and our own hearts, we show ourselves impatient and want to judge everything immediately. In this way, we lose hope,” he said.

Patience helps us to be merciful

Pope Francis concluded his homily explaining that “patience helps us to be merciful in the way we view ourselves, our communities and our world.”

He invited consecrated men and women and all the faithful never to stop welcoming the patience of the Holy Spirit, never to stop bearing with one another and radiating the joy of fraternal life, never to stop patiently offering our service:

“These are real challenges for our consecrated life: we cannot remain stuck in nostalgia for the past or simply keep repeating the same old things. We need patience and courage in order to keep advancing, exploring new paths, and responding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.”

Never gossip and don't lose your sense of humour!

At the end of the Mass Pope Francis thanked Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life for having welcomed those present. He noted that in this time of pandemic patience is sorely needed to move forward “offering the Lord our lives.”

And referring again to his just pronounced homily dedicated to “patience” he reflected on how life within a religious community is rife with the danger of gossip.

“Please remove yourselves from gossip”, he said, “it kills community life!”

The Pope acknowledged that sometimes this is not easy but invited consecrated men and women to “bite their tongues” before gossiping about others: “Bite your tongue, so it will swell up and occupy your mouth and you won't be able to speak badly!”

The other bit of advice he had in store for his brothers and sisters, religious is never to lose their sense of humour: “It helps us so much. It's the anti-gossip, knowing how to laugh at yourself, at situations, even at others - with a good heart!”

“Thank you,” the Pope concluded, “for what you do, thank you for your testimony. Thank you, thank you very much for your difficulties, for the way you carry them and for the way you bear the pain in the face of a lack of vocations: have courage, the Lord is great, the Lord loves us. Let us follow the Lord!”

REFLECTION:

‘This is the purpose of our hope – that God never tires of waiting for us.’

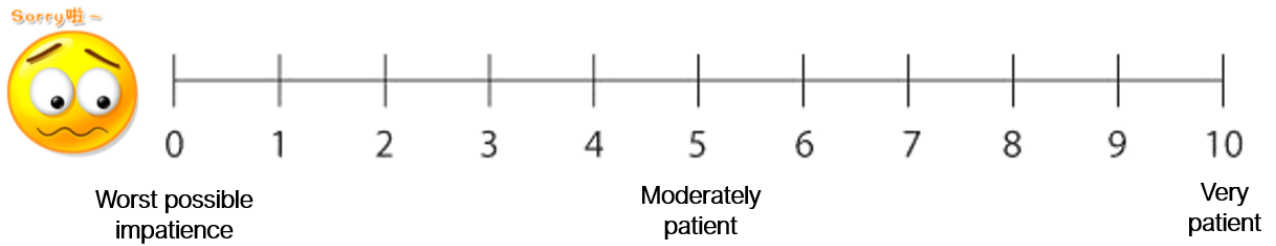
Let us look to the patience of God and the patience of Simeon as we consider our own lives of consecration.



Reflecting on the reality of daily life with all its joys and challenges, how **PATIENT** am I:

- with myself, in community and with the world?

- On a scale of 1 – 10 where would I place myself?



- Where would my community members place me?
- Do I see any discrepancies?
- What am I called to change so that I can be more patient?

As we enter the season of Lent maybe we can abstain from our lack of **PATIENCE**, with ourselves, others and the world, *unless we have the patience of Simeon!*

The World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life was instituted in 1997 by Pope Saint John Paul II. This celebration is attached to the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord on February 2nd. The celebration of World Day for Consecrated Life is transferred to the following Sunday in order to highlight the gift of consecrated persons for the whole Church.