

To Put up Patiently with Irritating People

... My Beloved Poor

The Apostle St. Paul writes, **“Bear with one another with love.”** This is perhaps the **most common, actual and universal work of mercy; it questions us every day**, wherever we go, because every day we are in contact with people, in our family, in our work place, along the road, on the bus, at the cinema, in the parish, in Church.

Sometimes we can choose the people with whom we can relate, with whom we can organise an event, an outing or a trip; thus we select the people, we choose those with whom we feel at home, those who have a similar temperament, ideas and feelings. But, normally, in life it is not like this: **we must accept people as they are but sometimes they are really “irritating”**. **On the other hand, we, too, may be, without wanting to be, “irritating people” for others.**

گي **TO BEAR UP** means putting up with something that causes suffering, discomfort and privation. It means tolerating, accepting without reacting, either unpleasant events or behaviour. In this work of mercy the virtue of patience must be necessarily present.

PATIENCE is a way of behaving characterised by the capacity of controlling, for the love of God, oneself, one’s own impulses and reactions in the face of people and events that cause us trouble, irritation and offence. The exercise of putting up with irritating people makes us always stronger. A Christian knows well that when he is hindered by tiresome people or by unpleasant events, he/she finds self in the situation of participating in the cross of Christ. Thus he/she is consoled by the Lord, consolation which gives the strength of patience and brings hope which is the certainty of eternal life. Patient endurance receives its force and support from the virtue of hope.

Patient endurance requires **PERSEVERANCE** without which one cannot obtain anything:

“The one who perseveres to the end will be saved.” (Mk 13:13)

“You should be clothed in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another.” (Col 3:12)

**“Perhaps you despise His great kindness, tolerance and patience.
Surely you know that God is kind because
He is trying to lead you to repent.”** (Rm 2:4)

As God gives each one of us time to change and convert ourselves, so too, we must offer to irritating people a new opportunity of living in peace with everyone, using patience, forbearance and indulgence. If we commit ourselves, with God's patience, in this work of spiritual mercy, we will receive strength to remain faithful to our duties, like Moses who, in the midst of numerous tribulations, was faithful and persevered as if he saw the One who is invisible, and like Jesus who faced His passion and death without losing sight of His resurrection and victory over sin and death.

کب How to Behave ?

St. Paul writes:

“Carry patiently the burdens of one another, with love.”

The two important words are **patiently** and **with love**. In the face of someone's irritating behaviour, we may rebel and grumble either openly or behind his/her back, or we may keep silent and put up with him/her. But tolerance alone is not sufficient. It is the second word “with love” which gives Christian meaning to endurance which makes it more acceptable and transforms it into a “work of mercy”.

Certainly it is not easy to put up with an irritating person with patience and love. Usually it is more difficult with people close at hand, with whom we spend many hours of the day together. And yet this work of mercy may be a way to holiness.

A Christian lives immersed in sufferings which are those of Christ and he/she carries the cross which is also that of Christ; for this reason he/she is consoled by the Lord Jesus and from Him he/she receives the strength to be patient.

Therefore, it means looking with faith at the Heavenly Father's attitude towards this world and, in particular, admiring the will of the Lord Jesus towards His Church for whom He gave His life on the Cross. God is patient, He does not strike down the sinner, but wants to save him; He holds back His anger so that man may be converted and live. Jesus wanted to bear the curse of the flesh and on the cross He fully satisfied man's debt with the Father. Through Jesus we are saved, in Him we are consoled and with Him strengthened to face every situation in life as a believer.

The Father's expectation is great. His patience is a powerful proof of love; He wants to assist all those He loves. Sometimes we are too impatient. But time is His. The price He paid was that of His death on the cross. Let us decide to be patient, let us not lose our trust, let us believe in the change of our brothers and sisters. Let us love, because love disarms the heart.

Patient endurance does not mean that one must bear everything in a passive way. It means rather a conscious decision. Jesus did not protest against every injustice but He accepted it without being torn to pieces. If I trust in the fact that God will do me justice, I must not settle every injustice.

I must rather distinguish now what may be more according to the spirit of Jesus.

- ❖ Sometimes it is according to the spirit of Jesus that **I reprimand the other person**, that I tell him/her that he/she is irritating and that he/she irritates me. **I make the other person note that with his/her behaviour** he/she will not have friends, but he/she will complicate his/her own life.

- ❖ **Speaking of the problem is always connected to the hope** that the other person may change and, in this way, make things easier for self and others.
- ❖ Another possibility consists in **keeping one's distance** from irritating people. In the case of people who do not accept boundaries, it is important to insist on the boundaries that limit our personal space and protect ourselves from those who are unable to respect it. In these cases it is necessary, at least, to maintain an interior detachment from that person so that his/her burden may not crush me.
- ❖ In life in common, in a community, work place, in the family, there is always a part of the other person that I must put up with. I cannot eliminate the burden of the other person either through dialoguing or keeping one's distance, or fighting against him/her. Keeping one's distance may sever every relationship. **Another way is to put up with the person just as he/she is.** St. Paul defines this capacity:

**“Help to carry one another's burdens,
and in this way you will obey the law of Christ.” (Gal 6:2)**

A community may exist only if the individuals are ready to put up mutually with one another.

گ Patience

Patience and endurance are connected.

Patience means “remain beneath”, but at the same time also **“show firmness”, ward off an attack.** It is not something merely passive.

It has, without a doubt, **the capacity to sustain something, without living it.**

It is also **resistance against hostile forces; one does not renounce, but fights with patience.**

One resists and perseveres even during persecution.

Be strong, remain standing, offer resistance ... tolerate passively, suffer.

It is allowed that the irritating brother or tiresome sister may be as they are.

Do not let yourself be conditioned by them. Be on their side. But do not **carry all the weight. Help them to carry it so that they may have their place in the community.**

Do not permit that the community be determined by them. That would crush it.

If Christ is your rock, your foundation, you may bear even these weak and irritating people without being crushed. You will not collapse under this weight. Remain steadfast.

Be strong, remain in Christ. Stand firm, **sustained by hope** that even those who have no stability, may succeed in accepting themselves ... We supported them while they were weak. But we did not bear them with our own strength but with the strength of Jesus Christ. And it is right to hope that this strength may flow through us also in those whom we put up with patiently.

St. Paul reminds us:

**“These sufferings bring patience, and patience brings perseverance,
and perseverance brings hope, and this hope is not deceptive,
because the love of God has been poured into our hearts
by the Holy Spirit which has been given us.” (Rm 5,3:5)**

3. To Assist

Lastly, here is the third part of our reflection: **“TO ASSIST”**.

I take up again the passage of the **parable of the Good Samaritan** in order to underline some points which may help us in the ministry of assisting the sick.

«... he then lifted him on to his own mount, carried him to the inn and looked after him. Next day, he took out two denarii and handed them to the innkeeper. “Look after him”, he said “and on my way back I will make good any extra expense you have.” (Lk 10:34-35)

We can note in Luke’s involving description, regarding the Good Samaritan, a man capable of generous service, balanced and open assistance.

“The characteristic of a Christian, of the Good Samaritan and of Jesus too, is a heart that sees. This heart sees where there is a need of love and acts as a consequence.” (DCE, 31)

Fausti, in his comment on the Gospel of Luke, writes: “Gratuity is the greatest freedom that makes us similar to God.”

- **Generous and balanced service**

Service is generous because, it not only involves giving time gratuitously but also it gives all its energy and means. **Love and take care of the other person as you would take care of yourself.**

It is a balanced and open assistance because it involves others in service and does not tie the healing of the wounded person to his own person and presence. He guarantees the poor man an adequate and sure assistance; **a well directed assistance** without losing sight of himself. In fact, he continues to be who he is.

A parallel passage, likewise meaningful and already mentioned in this reflection, can be found in Mark 2:3ff: «When some people came (to Jesus) bringing him a paralytic carried by four men»

Just as the Samaritan, even the four stretcher-bearers, are not given a name. They come onto the scene, carry out elegantly and with great creativity their service and then disappear without any expectation or making their lives depend on the sick person ..., or even unbalance their lives.

Luciano Sandron writes: «There are many professional people who pass, more or less quickly, from warmth to coldness, from enthusiasm to apathy, as the result of what students call “burnout”: this refers to a kind of working stress present, especially, in professions of assistance. That is, in those who work in the health service, etc. where involvement is predominant and the problems of the other person are easily shared by the person who wants to help.

Those who are, for a long time, exposed to situations in which there is a strong unbalance between REQUESTS and RESOURCES, are at risk. An unbridgeable gap is created between ideals and reality, between what is required by one’s profession (though it may be interpreted as a vocation) and the organization of work, between what people ask and the concrete possibilities of helping them. And not having enough time for oneself! With the sensation of always being at work 24 hours a day.

- **Without getting mixed up**

When we take care of fragile people “continuously”, who suffer for a series of problems and situations in life, empathy mixes up our sentiments with those of the other person, his needs with our own “need to be recognised that we are in need too”, and mixes up personal life with social life. To understand this type of burnout it is important to focus our attention on our relationship and on a kind of involvement that the helper is called to establish with the person to be helped, and to understand the nature and the depth of this relationship. **This is the nucleus of the problem for those who spend their lives helping people who suffer** and feel called to be compassionate.»

Dealing continually with people who suffer and are sick, psychologically fragile, anxious and needy, implies great effort on an emotional, intellectual and spiritual level. Also because the other person reminds us, with his/her presence, of suffering, fragility, mental weakness, limitations and death and makes us see, “AS IN A MIRROR”, that which we could become, at any moment of our life.

The relationship becomes particularly stressful when it becomes affectively intimate, when professional boundaries are eliminated and emotional identification and fusion are created, there where the wounds which we believed to be forgotten are re-opened.

- **Evaluating with freedom**

It is necessary to look at ourselves in the mirror with honesty, not closing ourselves in impossible roles (masks) and defensive armour which deviate us from our true self, and regain, too, possession of ourselves balancing our BEING A NEIGHBOUR TO OTHERS WITH BEING A NEIGHBOUR TO OURSELVES, WITHOUT HARMFUL DEPENDENCE.

If we are free enough, we can help others without losing our own way: this means being a neighbour to the other person without forgetting to be a neighbour to ourselves, and, above all, without creating that dependence which makes a prisoner of the helper and the person helped: all this prevents “healthy, personal growth” for both “partners” of the relationship.

“True love, in its various expressions, does not create dependence in either of the two partners of the relationship: in the parable, the Good Samaritan, after having helped and promised the innkeeper to pay all the expenses for the hospitality given to the wounded man, CONTINUES ON HIS WAY, he does not let himself be detained by the one he saved, but HE RETURNS TO HIS WAY OF LIFE AND HIS OCCUPATIONS. (p. 16)

Thus, let us try to “INSTRUCT”, “COMFORT” and “ASSIST” in the best way we can, as a genuine service given to Christ who suffers in our brothers and sisters (cf Mt 25), so that our charism may shine even through this ministry so dear to our Foundress.

I would like to finish with a very incisive passage of the Unabridged Rule concerning ministry in the Hospital: «... *However, since in this holy exercise everything is repugnant to our human limitations as it requires a more ardent charity, the Sisters are reminded of that saying of Our Divine Saviour that whatever we do to the least of His Poor Ones is done to Him. Also Our Holy Crucified Lord Himself is put under the eyes of the Sisters recalling to their thoughts that, for them and for the sick they go to visit, He suffered on the Cross with unconquerable patience, meekness, sufferance and gentleness. He forgot Himself out of love and sacrificed Himself in order to save us.* (UR, p. 159)