

"Our Patient God"
Homily of October 10, 2004
by Father Brian Joyce

You know, that's really not the way it works. That is not how it works! There may be some rare, unique exceptions along the way, but that is not the way it works. I am talking about the gospel. You have these ten people who have been sick for a long time, seriously ill, ten lepers. They stand across the street from Jesus and they say, "Jesus, help us." and Boom! He cures them. They are dealing with sickness and pain and their lives, and Boom! He fixes it.

I don't know about you. In my experience that's not the way it works. All I know, in our personal lives and in the history of our world and in the story of our universe, it just doesn't work that way. If we have personal relationships that are broken and there is resentment or anger or if we have an unhappy marriage, it doesn't work that way. It takes prayer and effort and lots of time and a lot more. With raising our children, or praying for our adult children to come back to the Church, it doesn't work that way. Boom! And they are back. It doesn't work that way. With illness, from heart disease, to leukemia or cancer, it doesn't work that way. With addictions, alcoholism or drug abuse, it doesn't work that way. With long days of deep depression or emotional or mental illness and problems, it doesn't work that way. And with problems at our work or maybe no work at all, unemployment, or just paying our daily bills, it doesn't work that way.

As a matter of fact, if we look beyond ourselves to global issues like world peace and international justice, it doesn't work that way there either. Will Durant, the historian, years ago, put together a history of the world from the earliest recorded history and one of his observations was that he could only find twenty-eight years in the history of our planet in which there was not war and organized blood shed going on. And remember, our God is a God of Peace. Our God is a God of Justice. But we have a long road to travel to get to justice and to get to peace, whether it is our personal lives or global issues or the universe story. Our God is a God of justice and peace, but also our God is a very patient God and a very faithful God who calls us to be patient and to be faithful.

Now, that is my whole message of today's homily. I'll say it again so you don't miss it, and once you get it, then you don't have to pay any attention the rest of the morning...Our God is a very patient God, but steadfast and faithful Who calls us to be a people who are patient but also faithful. Now, if you got that, you can doze off. I'm going to talk a few more moments, but it doesn't matter.

I think a lot of you know that, earlier this week, I was in Barcelona in Spain. And the most famous and treasured citizen of the city of Barcelona is a renowned architect, Antonio Gaudi. He died in 1926 at the age of 74. In fact, the Vatican is considering him for sainthood, which, if that happens, is going to be a first. It will be amazing because never, in the two thousand year history of the Church, has an artist been canonized a saint, or so honored. Not DaVinci, not Mozart, not Michelangelo, no

artists! And Gaudi may be the first.

His buildings are scattered all over the city of Barcelona and they are fantastic and amazing and striking in their style. But his number one signature building and the number one signature of the city of Barcelona is his unfinished church of the Holy Family. It is called the Church of Sagrada Familia. It has three major entrances and each one, over it, has four towering steeples, hundreds of feet high, and each entrance or facade depicts a different aspect of the life of Jesus. One has the birth of Jesus. One has the death of Jesus. One has the resurrection of Jesus. For example, the facade, the entrance, that has His birth, it's Christmas all over again. He's got the Holy Family. He's got the shepherds. He's got the Magi. He's got the angels. He's got colorful holiday fruits, apples and peaches and pears, Christmas trees all over the place. The church was begun in 1882 and they expect to complete it by 2022. That's one hundred forty years. Gaudi spent forty-three years of his life living simply in the basement of that church and going to his daily work throughout the city and working on that church. And when people would tell him that the church would never be finished in his lifetime, he would simply shrug his shoulders and smile and say, "My client is not in a hurry...My client is not in a hurry."

Our God is not in a hurry. If you or I were God we would probably say, "I want it done. I want it done my way and I want it done right now." Our God is not in a hurry. Our God is patient, but our God is also faithful. There is no lowering of standards. Our God is patient forever and faithful each and every day, faithful to the standards that we are called to, of peace and justice, faithful to the values that we are called to of a morality of the heart, of a radical equality for everyone, the values of compassion and forgiveness. That's the plan. That's the plan for us and for our world. That's the plan for as long as it takes.

There are two prayers that I find very helpful. They are both familiar to you. One is the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi that begins "Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace..." It's just the opposite of what the lepers do. The lepers are standing there saying, "Lord, You do it. Do a miracle. You do it, Lord. You take care of everything." And Francis of Assisi says, "No. No. That's not the way to pray. Lord, make me an instrument..." Not a quick fix, but a joint venture, that we are called to work together and to walk together with our God. Lord, make us instruments of Your peace, of Your hope, of Your forgiveness, of Your joy.

And the second prayer that I find helpful is also familiar. It is written by an American theologian in 1932. "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, and grant me the courage to change the things I can and grant me the wisdom to know the difference." Grant me to live one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time, accepting hardships as part of the pathway to peace, taking, as You did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would like it to be, trusting that You will make all things right if I surrender to Your plan, to Your wisdom, to Your will, that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with You forever in the next. Amen.