

"A REMEDYE AGAYNS IRE"

Hebrews 12: 1 & 2

"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Hebrews). "Patience," wrote Thomas A. Kempis in the 15th century, "is something all recommend and few practice." True, we all need it. (That's why, in the hospital we are even called "patients". We need so much of it there!" In Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, "The Parson's Tales" contains some interesting insights, none-the-less, it takes the most patience to read--most boring (how fitting!) (For one thing) flat prose--even Chaucer couldn't make a sermon sing! But if you can wade through it, it does have some very practical, insightful things to say about that most difficult virtue, PATIENCE. By "patience", Chaucer meant something special! He meant that if one wishes to overcome all evil temper there is something better than just keeping the mouth shut--though that too is better than nothing! If one wishes to overcome the impulse to vengeance, if one wishes to overcome the impulse to repay the mean old world in kind for every outrageous thing it has made one suffer--if one is going to overcome the craving to claw and scratch and spit back, to quote Chaucer, every "adversitee and every wikked word" heaped on one, an impulse, which, if one gives way, will only make, said he, a "devil's furnace" out of life (and most of us do spend our days with the fat in the fire). Then one jolly well better develop a sense of humor about it all and learn to laugh--smile at one's own infirmities--grin over the foibles of one's fellows--even chuckle at the strange antics of that fellow called fate. Such good-humored patience with man and God. Oh, yes--one must even be patient with God. In short--to face the world without bitterness--be patient--with yourself, who are far from perfect, with others, who are far from perfect, with God, who takes his own sweet time. And to be patient, according to Chaucer's parson, does not mean to live a cowardly, cringing life of silent desperation--biting your tongue so you won't curse--or stifling your fears so you won't blubber--or keeping a stiff upper lip with a martyred look because life is so disappointing--or holding on to your temper for dear life as though you were holding onto a wolfhound on a leash. No, that's not patience. That's just controlled impatience--which may be the best some of us can manage; but to be patient--says Chaucer's parson--is to be "debonair"--to have a sense of humor--patience is to practice the laughter of real religion--so that we can take with grace and lightheartedness the most outrageous misfortunes--so that one can face every injustice and insult to body and mind with the blue-blood's courage and charm--so that no matter what happens to one--one is no longer pitiful or angry--but one is an aristocrat to the grave--gracious and good humored both to

God and man. Like the redoubtable Sir Thomas Moore, who commanded great respect but ever "served with mirth" right up to the gallows--saying to the hangman-- "help me up the steps, sir--but as for my coming down--I will shift for myself." Or as a contemporary said of Abraham Lincoln in his darkest hours when set upon by all sides: He "smiles at calamity. His good nature is a lamp that never goes out, but burns, with a shady light". Mr. Lincoln's infinite patience--was not that of the martyr or the coward--but of the good natured.

Would that someone could say of us: "See that Christian over there? He smiles at calamity. His good nature is a lamp that never goes out." Too bad they usually have to say, "See that pious old Presbyterian over there? He glowers even at God--and his bad temper never ceases...." It is sad that by looking at some of us--you would never know that Christ lived--much less laughed.

Indeed, most Presbyterians don't believe Jesus ever said, "Happy are the debonair--for they shall inherit the earth." At least that's the way the French render "Blessed are the meek" and it's a good translation of the Greek. And our Lord himself always had the patience of the debonair--his disposition was gentle, his speech kind and often humorous, his ways gracious, courteous in all things, without affectation, a man of good breeding, a man of God, which is what Chaucer's parson meant by patience. That is debonair.

"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith". If anyone ever had that "patience....which sufferth debonairly" all the outrages of adversitee and every wikked word, He had it. He could have struck out in wrath at Judas in the garden that night before his arrest--and wished him dead and in hell--but instead, with a quiet smile of infinite patience--he called Judas "friend"--and asked "betrayest thou...with a kiss?" And He inquired of those soldiers--with a calm touch of humor--as He stood so obviously unarmed and harmless--with His hands down by His side. "Are ye come out as against a robber with swords and clubs?" And he chuckled and I think they blushed.

Throughout all the trials and tribulations of his short and turbulent career, Jesus of Nazareth remained God's good, sweet tempered, patient, troubadour, praying finally, for those who taunted and tortured him: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Those were the typical words wearied, but good natured mothers used to excuse,

before their husbands, the blunders of the mischievous children, "father, forgive them, they know not what they do."

Our Lord never lost his patience. He kept it to the very end. I wish some artist could paint him smiling, a smile of serenity and peace.

"Let not your heart be troubled, my peace I give unto you--never fear--"