

*32963 Faith Column for 12-8-11
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Can't Stand Waiting?

We are not a culture that tolerates a long wait. Fast food, instant coffee, and drive-through banking were all the inspirations of time-challenged people like us. We want what we want when we want it – and we want it now! So let's be honest, patience, as a virtue instilled through waiting, is not something that most of us are hoping to have to develop. Oddly enough though, this season of the Christian calendar, called Advent – a term derived from the Latin word meaning “to come” – is all about waiting. We Christians are all waiting for our Messiah to come to us as the tiny babe of Bethlehem at Christmas.

Remember how interminable this Advent period of waiting for Christmas felt as a child? It always seemed to us like a period of excruciating torment, meant to manipulate us into good behavior in anticipation of the Santa whose vision from his workshop at the North Pole allowed him to separate the good little girls and boys (destined for the best gifts) from the bad little girls and boys (who would be left only coal in their Christmas stockings.)

In retrospect, Advent waiting didn't seem to develop the virtue of patience in us, exactly. In fact, impatience seemed to mount the nearer we drew to the big day. But all those years of Advent waiting did teach us something. It seemed to settle in our minds the notion that waiting should be accompanied by attention to the development of good character. And that's not such a bad linkage. Even as adults, if we were to approach waiting as a chance to undertake some self-assessment and make some needed modification to our lives, then maybe our waiting, difficult though it is, could be some of the most positive and productive time we spend.

Could you undertake some productive waiting? If we're all waiting for something, then we all have that opportunity for productive self-growth. And we are all waiting for something important, aren't we? Whether we wait for a relationship to be restored, or a health issue or a financial problem to be resolved, or a loss to heal, or an answer to be known, we all have to wait. While we are no longer impatient children, none of us loves the delayed conclusion to our hopes, dreams, and concerns. But handled well, our waiting for some resolution in important matters of our lives can be significant fallow time when we allow growth processes to slowly occur within us, as we are made ready for whatever lies ahead. We are not simply looking to become good little girls and boys, in order to receive some simple reward – but to grow in goodness and grace in order to claim God's ultimate promises with gladness. In the words of the prophet, Isaiah: “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles.”

Christmas is coming. And beyond that date, many worthwhile dreams and goals will await fulfillment. Enjoy the wait!