



One of the well-defined virtues in the life of St. Mary is the virtue of long-suffering. For example:

- When St. Mary conceived without the seed of man according to the word of the angel, she waited for the Lord until the angel's appearance to Joseph and cleared her position with him (Matthew 1:20). It is apparent that this took some time. Why? The Holy Gospel according to St. Mathew reveals that even St. Joseph started to doubt St. Mary's innocence and had actually prepared a resolution in his mind of how to put her away secretly. He was a righteous man and did not want to make a public spectacle of her.
- Though still very young, St. Mary endured much hardship during her travels to Egypt with the infant Christ and St. Joseph (Matthew 2:13). This demonstrates that she must have acquired the virtue of long-suffering from an early age.
- During the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, He was away from His mother most of the time—serving and traveling from one place to another. She endured all of this with patience even to the

extent that at one time she was asking and sending messengers to the Lord Jesus Christ to tell Him, "*Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You*" (Matthew 12:47). 'His brothers' are actually in reference to the Lord's cousins (The Principal Works of St. Jerome—Treatise: The Perpetual Virginity of Blessed Mary).

- Most evidence of her long-suffering was demonstrated when she endured the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ and His passion on the cross.

The virtue of long-suffering is vividly distinct in St. Mary's life. It is no wonder that St. Mary acquired and developed this virtue because long-suffering is one of the attributes of God Himself, revealed in the Holy Book of Joel 2:13: "*Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm.*" Slow to anger means He is patient. The definition of long-suffering means, "the ability to suffer for a long time." Thus, the virtue of long-suffering is the ability to suffer and to accept the suffering for a long time.

We are living in a time that people want convenience. They do not want to be troubled by

anything or bother to make any effort. Everything is with a remote control—just touch, and there it is. There is no need for any exertion. People are trying to do the least amount of effort as possible. This is not even concerning any suffering. Imagine if the people who are now accustomed to do no effort or the minimum amount of effort are asked or required to suffer? They will reject this idea immediately. Of course, the idea of suffering for a longer period of time will be an incomprehensible foreign concept to them.

How can we learn to accept to suffer for a long time? People are not patient with each other anymore. There is conflict now between friends, between family members, between workers, between servants, and between brothers and sisters, because we refuse to suffer or to be patient or to carry each other's burdens or to even carry our own crosses. Actually, most conflicts are because we do not want to give the other person another chance or we refuse to accept suffering; so, we seek the easy solution of walking away from suffering.

Although God told us to strive to enter through the narrow gate, we often forget this narrow gate implies suffering. The Lord did not promise us a life free from suffering, but He promised that all suffering will turn into glory if we suffer with Him because we

will be glorified with Him (Romans 8:17). There is no comparison between the sufferings of this temporary world with the glory that will be revealed to us where we will enjoy the eternal life with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Abstinence, as a vital component of fasting, has almost disappeared from spiritual practices in the lives of many Christians today. People do not want to suffer during the fasting period. Most people do not even actually abstain from eating and drinking at all. When they wake up in the morning, they drink their coffee and eat their breakfast. Ironically, during times of fasting, we try to spoil ourselves by indulging in some of the best "fasting" foods. Where then is the suffering? Where is the effort? Where is the entering through the narrow gate? It is fading quickly in our lives or maybe it already disappeared for some. That is why when it comes to fighting spiritual warfare and fighting against sin, many people cannot actually fight against sin because they want everything to be easy. Why should I fight? Maybe, I can fall right now and later confess it? We need to learn from St. Mary and from God Himself how to accept suffering and be willing to suffer for a long time.

Long-suffering can be manifested in many ways, but there are four critical areas in a practical life:

[1] The first dimension is how to be steadfast and endure when there is a heavy burden without getting angry, without losing your peace, without thinking about repaying any evil with evil, and without complaining.

One of the beautiful passages in the Holy Bible is in 2 Corinthians 4:8: "*We are hard-pressed on every side.*" This confirms that there are hardships anywhere we go; and from every side, we are hard-pressed. However, in spite of this, we have confidence. Maybe, the question is how can you endure and how can you be steadfast under heavy burdens? It is because of our confidence in God. We are confident "*that all things work together for good for those who love God*" (Romans 8:28).

Confidence and faith in God are essential for the endurance of heavy burdens without complaining, without losing one's peace, and without losing one's patience. St. Paul articulated this very well; "*We are hard-pressed on every side yet not crushed*" (2 Corinthians 4:8). We know that we are hard-pressed from every side and hardships come from everywhere, but we know also that God will protect us. I may be pressured from every side, but I will not be crushed.

"*We are perplexed*" (2 Corinthians 4:8). This means you do not know the direction to take. When you do

not know what decision you should make you, then you are confused. When we are confused about the direction of our lives or decisions in our lives, we could fall in despair. St. Paul said: "*We are perplexed, but not in despair*" (2 Corinthians 4:8). Why? St. Paul knew that God would guide him because Christ is the head of the Church. Being the head of the Church means Christ is the leader of the Church, and therefore, He will lead us. He will make the decisions for us. He will guide us. The point is that we should refrain from being leaders of ourselves. We should stop from being the head to ourselves because two heads will not work together. Thus, I need to deny myself completely, reject to be the head of myself, refuse to plan for myself, and decline to make decisions for myself. Rather, I surrender and accept the will of God. Even if I am confused or perplexed, I trust Him. I have confidence in Him and I ask for His guidance. God will reveal His will in so many ways. He will reveal His will, not based on our righteousness, but based on our surrender to Him when we humbly ask Him.

Many people believe that God will only reveal His will and make us understand His will if we are righteous and saintly. No, that is not the case. If we ask Him, He will tell us the way. We read about many scenarios in the New Testament when people

asked the Lord Jesus Christ spiritual questions and He answered them, like the rich man when he asked the Lord what should he do to inherit the kingdom of God? The Lord Christ answered him and did not tell him that because of his unrighteous and the love of money still in his heart, He will not answer his question (cf. Matthew 19:1-12; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-23). Likewise, if we go to God, He will answer us. If we go to God with a sincere heart, which is what is meant by surrendering to Him sincerely, by accepting His will in our lives, and by our willingness to take His guidance and His leadership faithfully, He will answer us and He will reveal His will to us. That is why even if we are perplexed, we should not lose our patience. We should trust God, and we will never be in despair.

St. Paul continues and says: "persecuted." Yes, we may suffer persecution, we may suffer pain, and our crosses can be heavy; but we are not forsaken. In the midst of all these persecutions, and in the midst of all these sufferings, God will not forsake us. We read in many narratives in the Holy Scripture and in the biographies of the saints and martyrs, how God supported the people. He did not promise to take us out of the way of persecutions, but He promised that He would be with us in the midst of the persecutions. He allowed the martyrs to be slain. He

allowed the martyrs to shed their blood. He did not stop this, but during those times, He was with them; though "*persecuted, but not forsaken*" (2 Corinthians 4:9).

Struck down? Yes, sometimes we feel that we are struck down. We are thrown down; but yet, we are not destroyed. God will protect us even if we are struck down (2 Corinthians 4:9). God will protect us. This confidence in God remains regardless of the pressures in our lives and regardless of our burdens. There can be many heavy burdens in our lives, but if we trust God and we ask Him to be with us, He will never abandon us. One of the titles of the Holy Spirit is the 'Comforter' because He comforts and consoles us during the time of hardships and during the time of tribulations. When we accept this and we put our trust in God, then we will feel that the suffering is actually a gift from God. We may wonder how St. Paul can say in his letter to the Philippians 1:29, "*For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.*" St. Paul was speaking about suffering as a gift. Why is it a gift? It is because suffering will be a time to experience the comfort and consolation of the Holy Spirit. If we accepted suffering as a gift from God, then we will enjoy the consolation and the comfort of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

- The first dimension of the virtue of the long-suffering is to accept and be willing to carry our heavy burdens and heavy cross without complaining and without losing our peace. The only way to do this is by having confidence in God that "*all things will work together for good to those who love God*" (Romans 8:28).

[2] Another dimension of long-suffering is to forgive and forget offenses from those whom we specifically expect much. It is easier to forgive and forget the trespasses of those who are more distant than it is to forgive and forget the transgressions of those who are close and dear.

We expect a lot from the people closest to us. It is a big challenge to forgive, forget, and move on with our lives when we are hurt from people who are closest and dearest to us. It is a dimension of long-suffering if we are willing to suffer for a long time and accept suffering even from those who are close and dear to us. If I am willing to accept suffering from them, this will actually help me to forgive and forget.

In 2 Timothy 4:16-18, St. Paul tells about his experience when he stood before Neron. Bear in mind that the Second Epistle to Timothy was the last

letter written by St. Paul before his own martyrdom. Thus, this letter was written after he had preached in the three missionary trips, made many disciples, and established many churches. Now, he was at the end of his life. He said: "*At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me*" (2 Timothy 4:16). Can you imagine that a servant, a priest, a bishop—any clergyman, after having served his congregation and the people faithfully and sincerely with love for a very, very long time, and no matter how much faithfulness and sincerity was in the service, can say, I served like St. Paul—nobody can claim this. Even St. Paul himself said; "*but I labored more abundantly than they all*" (1 Corinthians 15:10). Nobody can claim this from any of us that we served like St. Paul. Can you imagine that at the end of your life and at the end of your journey, you find nobody standing beside you? Can you imagine the hurt at this time? Can you imagine how difficult this will be in the heart of the servant, especially one like St. Paul who made many, many disciples? During his defense, he did not find one single person from any of his friends, disciples, believers, or from the churches that he established to stand next to him. How did St. Paul deal with this? Was he angry? Was he upset? No. Actually, he said: "*May it not be charged against them*" (2 Timothy 4:16). He did not hold this against them. He wanted to give them an

excuse. In actuality, God used this opportunity for St. Paul's benefit. "*But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me*" (2 Timothy 4:17).

There is an interesting spiritual rule that says: "When human consolation decreases, divine consolation increases." At this time near the end of his life, St. Paul could not find comfort or consolation from human beings. This was the time for him to experience God. The strength that he received from God is why he said: "*But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion*" (2 Timothy 4:17). St. Paul did not say, "I will stop; I am not going to preach anymore; nobody of whom I preached is worthy." St. Paul actually said the opposite, "*that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear*" (2 Timothy 4:17). "I will continue to serve. I will continue to preach. I will continue to travel from place to place. I am not going to charge them with this. I will not hold it against them though nobody stood with me"—and not only that, but also, "*And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work*" (2 Timothy 4:18). My trust is in the Lord, not in humans, "*from every evil work and preserve me for*

His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen" (8 Timothy 4:18)! If we learned how to put our trust in God and not to expect much from people, even from those who are close and dear to us, then we will be able to forgive them and forget the hurt and to move on with our lives.

This was the second dimension in learning how to grow in the virtue of long-suffering. We learn when we are willing to suffer from even the people who are close and dear to us. David the Prophet wrote in his Psalms, "*The Lord is my light and my salvation*" (Psalm 27:1), and also, "*When my father and my mother forsake me,? Then the Lord will take care of me*" (Psalm 27:10). Thus, even if my parents have forsaken me, the Lord has accepted me, and with Him, I need nothing else on earth.

- The first dimension in long-suffering is how to be steadfast and how to endure under any heavy burden.
- The second dimension is how to accept suffering or hurt from people from whom we expect a lot and from people who are very close or very dear to us.

[3] The third dimension is persistence, perseverance, and continuing in doing what is right and what is good for a long time

without laziness or hesitation. Many people will do many noble things in their lives, and many have already started doing some good things, but not everyone perseveres and continues to do what is right and what is good.

Many people make New Year resolutions. For example, if I do not pray, I will make a resolution that to keep my canon in prayer; if I do not read the Bible, I will keep my canon in reading the Holy Bible. Maybe, the year will start with a good will for about one—two weeks, but by January 15th or 20th, everything is over and those who made these resolutions will wait until the next year. Thus, to discontinue and not persevere to do what is right and what is good is the wrong kind of suffering. Continue to do what is right and what is good for a long time. St. Peter had good intentions when he said to the Lord Jesus Christ, *"Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble"* (Matthew 26:33). Furthermore, he added, *"Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You"* (Matthew 26:35)! This shows he had a good will. I believe that St. Peter was very sincere when he said these words to the Lord, but for how long did he persevere? His will was exhibited when they arrested the Lord Jesus Christ in Gethsemane and he drew

his sword. Yes, that was wrong, but at least he showed that he would defend and he will fight for the Lord Jesus Christ. He drew his sword and demonstrated his courage at this time to defend the Lord. The Lord told him, no, but rather to return his sword to its place; that is not our way to defend ourselves. A few hours later, St. Peter actually denied our Lord Jesus Christ and did not persevere. He was afraid. Where is your sword? Where is your strength? Where is your power?

Many of us are like St. Peter. We start doing something good, but at the first obstacle, we stop. Maybe, I start serving in church, but when I am faced with the first obstacle, I want stop and I will not continue serving in church. That is why we need perseverance. We need a support system in our lives to encourage us, motivate us, and help us keep going in every good endeavor of our lives. In order to persevere, we need to have a strong relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ because He is the real support in the support system of our lives. The Holy Spirit will comfort, support, encourage, and motivate me. That is why one of the titles of the Holy Spirit is the 'Helper' because He helps me.

Without asking the Holy Spirit for strength to persevere, it will be a big challenge to continue through the intercessions of the saints. St. Paul

wrote about the importance of the saints' intercessions for perseverance in Hebrews 12.

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1). How can I run the race with endurance? I can because I am supported with the cloud of the witnesses around me. When I ask for the prayers of St. Mary, St. Anthony the Great, Archangel Michael, or any of the angels or saints, they can help me through their intercessions. That is why St. Paul said, *"since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us"* (Hebrews 12:1). Thus, we must fix our sight on the Lord Jesus Christ and consider in our hearts how He endured for us, as St. Paul continued and said, *"looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God"* (Hebrews 12:2). Thus, we must fix our sight on the Lord Jesus Christ and be like Him. Let us fix our eyes also on the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, so when we look at the joy that is before us, we will be able to endure and not despise the suffering despite

the shame, but we will be able to endure for a long time.

Fix Your Eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ

- Ask the help of the Holy Spirit
- Ask for the intercessions of the saints
- Fix your eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ
- Set your eyes on the joy before you
- Have godly people around you—people in the church and your spiritual father, who will help you with their advice and support you with their prayers

Thus, you can persevere in your spiritual journey and not weaken in adversity, like did St. Peter when he was in a distressed time in his life—that is, start and a short time later, stop.

- The first dimension for long-suffering is the ability to carry a heavy burden for a long time with thanksgiving and without complaining.
- The second dimension of long-suffering is the ability to accept suffering and hurt from people who are close and dear and the ability to forgive them and to forget this hurt.
- The third dimension of long-suffering is the ability to continue doing noble acts and services and to do what is right and what is good for a

long time until we finish the race. If somebody is in a competition and starts to run, and run, and run, but stops before the end, he will lose the race. We must strive to finish the race to the end.

[4] The fourth and last dimension of the virtue of long-suffering is to not expect quick results, but rather to be patient.

Sometimes, when start our spiritual journey, we want to be like St. Mary in a very short time. We want to be like St. Anthony and we want swift results. For example, you fight against sin, and perhaps this sin had taken you captive for years. You may want to get rid of this sin in one week, but it does not work this way. That is why St. James teaches us in his epistle, *"Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth"* (James 5:7) The farmer plants the seed and waits. He may wait for years before he receives fruit from this or that tree. Notice, though, the manner of how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, *"waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain"* (James 5:7). You also must be patient. Prepare your heart for the coming of the Lord is at hand. *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to*

God" (Philippians 4:6). Due to anxieties, people demand instantaneous results, especially now in the age of quick communication. You send a text message and expect to receive a response in less than one minute. You send an email and expect to receive the reply in less than one minute. In the same manner, are we going to the Lord in the fourth watch? Of course not! We are expecting to receive a reply in the same minute. How can I wait for the fourth watch? That is how the Lord works with us. He wants us to be patient. In many of the Psalms, we read, "wait for the Lord with all your heart." We need to be patient and to wait for the fruit. We should not expect instant results. Maybe we pray for something and God is slow to answer. Be assured, He will answer, but He may be slow in answering to teach us how to pray, how to connect with Him, and how to have a relationship with Him. It is true that many times God does not answer immediately. He may take a long time as he did with Zachariah and Elizabeth to answer their request. If we do not know how to experience long-suffering in a godly way, we will expect speedy results. This will, therefore, be another challenge to acquiring the virtue of long-suffering.

In conclusion, there are the four dimensions essential to acquiring the virtue of long-suffering.

Let us ask God to help us to develop this virtue in our lives, because without Him, we cannot attain it.

- Let us ask God to help us to be willing to endure suffering and to carry our heavy burdens and crosses for long periods of time as He carried His cross.
- Let us ask God to help us to accept hurt from people who are close and dear and to be willing to forgive them and to forget the pain.
- Let us ask God to help us to persevere and to do what is right and what is good and not to give up quickly.
- Let us ask God to help us to not expect immediate results, but to be patient and to wait for the Lord who comes in the fourth watch, as we read in the Holy Book of Isaiah 40:31:

*"But those who wait on the Lord
Shall renew their strength;
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint."*

May God grant us the virtue of long-suffering through the intercessions and prayers of St. Mary, St. Anthony, and all the saints.

Glory be to God forever and ever, Amen!

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