

## **December 15, 2013 Patience Homily**

Dear brothers and sisters, the critically acclaimed and hugely successful musical play "Fiddler on the Roof" is set in the small Russian village of Anatevka. The village is home to a small community of Jews, who are vastly outnumbered by the larger Christian community. The story takes place sometime in the Nineteenth century, a period when Jews were most vulnerable to persecution by Russian State Officials.

In one of the key scenes of the play, the Jewish community is informed, in no uncertain terms, that they must evacuate their homes immediately and leave Anatevka for good. One anguished young Jew approached his spiritual leader, the beloved rabbi of the village, with a troubling question in mind. "Rabbi, we waited all our lives for the Messiah. Wouldn't now be a good time for him to come", he asked. The rabbi replied, "We'll have to wait for him somewhere else".

The chosen people have been schooled in patience. They are accustomed to waiting, even for centuries! Even today, Orthodox Jewish children have their finest clothes close by their beds at night just in case the long awaited Messiah comes under cover of darkness.

But what of Christians, do we recognize the need to be watchful and patient? Several years ago, the University of Notre Dame published a book written by the highly esteemed Nobel prize winning Jewish author, Elie Wiesel, a concentration camp survivor. In his introduction to the book, Father Theodore Hesburgh, the then president of Notre Dame, wrote the following words:

"It makes little difference that Jews wait for the Messiah while the Christians wait for the Messiah's second coming. Both wait. It is the human condition. It demands a difficult and balanced response. Jews and Christians can learn much from each other about the proper way to wait".

I must confess that I hate delays. Patience is not one of my virtues. I prefer, "fast food", "quick fixes", "immediate seating" and "speedy recoveries". Oftentimes, I have trouble waiting for the traffic light to change. "Road rage" is not unknown to me. The famed American author, F. Scott Fitzgerald, once wrote of the three worst things in life. First, to lie in bed and not fall asleep; second, to try and please someone and fail; and third, to wait for someone who does not come".

In our second reading from the letter of James, the apostle counsels his fellow Christians to be patient. "Be patient until the coming of the Lord" (Ja. 5:7). In addition, he commends the prophets of old in the following words, "Take as an example of hardship and patience, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord." (Ja.5:10).

We must be patient in the Christian faith. All worthwhile things take time! One of the major figures of Advent is John the Baptist. As one who spoke in the name of the Lord, his patience was severely tested. His faith may have wavered. But he received joyful news regarding the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: "Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell

John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them"(Mt.11:4-5). The steadfast patience of the prophet was rewarded. The Lord is ever-faithful to his promises.

We Christians wait in joyful hope for the second coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ. It is one of the major themes of the Advent season. Let us not grow weary of waiting patiently for the Lord. And like the Orthodox Jews, let us be open to our being schooled in patience. Only then will we be ready when He manifests His glory.

Amen