

I'll try to keep it a little shorter today because we have our Advent CCS speaker as well. My last year in graduate school I was discerning where God wanted me. I had felt a call to the priesthood during my Ph.D. program but put off testing it until I got my degree. But in November of 1991 I finished my doctorate in history and was ready to start the rest of my life.

So, in January of 1992 I applied for the Archdiocese of Seattle. And Archbishop Murphy accepted me! I was almost 30. I had already been in college for 12 years and was looking at five more years in the seminary. I was ready to go and get on with it! But . . . seminary didn't begin until the following September. So, I moved home and worked at a grocery store in Issaquah. I was the world's most educated helper-clerk (one step above a bagger). Or, as some engineers and accountants I know would say, I was doing all that my doctorate in history equipped me for. In any case, there I was for nine months, seemingly marking time, waiting to take my next step toward God.

“Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?”

Here John the Baptist, in prison, embodies holy patience. John has been watching for the Messiah all his life, but it’s clear he is willing to wait some more. His humility allows him to wait without end for God to act. This willingness to wait upon God shows his trust in the Father.

In our second reading from James, we hear a similar theme, “Be patient . . . brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and late rains. You too must be patient.”

As with my own discernment and living out of God’s call to the priesthood, we all are sometimes asked by God to wait upon His own timing and plan. But there is a difference between waiting on God and forgetting about Him. It can happen that we get a sense of what God wants us to do, but circumstances prevent us from acting for the moment – and then as time goes by, we forget our first enthusiasm and drift back into worldly priorities. That’s forgetting God.

A fruitful waiting, on the other hand, as the example of John the Baptist shows, means going about our lives while watching in expectation for God to act, trusting that He will – in His own time. This is a fruitful, even holy, stance for us to take – not the waste of time we're tempted to think it. John sees his life – even as he endures prison -- as the eager watching of God's plan unfolding, as he plays his assigned part in it. He finds this waiting satisfying and good, even though it's not what he would choose (he wants to see the Messiah!), because he's doing all God asks of him for the current moment.

What about us? Can we see those periods of waiting in life as a watching of God's plan unfold, as we play our part in it? Those nine months at the grocery store weren't wasted. I prayed, went to mass. I matured spiritually. I re-learned what it was like to work 40 hour-weeks like the rest of the world.

Perhaps you are right now discerning God's will for yourself in some matter. Maybe you want to get married, but you are still waiting

for God to present the right person to you. Or you want a child but that isn't happening. Perhaps you contemplating a career change, but haven't yet received confirmation that's what God wants. Maybe your prayer life has become dry even though you are very faithful to it. Will God ever show Himself as He once did? Does your life seem stuck?

It might just be a matter of waiting some more. Sometimes that's all God wants from us at the moment. Let us be patient in our waiting upon God, as the farmer is waiting upon the rain. Let us be patient with ourselves. The farmer does his bit planting the seed, then he waits for God to do His divine work of providing the rain. It's Advent. Let us continue to keep a vigilant watch for the coming of Jesus into our lives in a new way, as He surely will, in His own time, if we wait patiently for Him.