

Discipleship and Patience

On our journey of evangelization we constantly are on the move: we are busy doing things big or small to spread the Gospel in His name. However, there could be days or even years in which we found ourselves pausing to wait for the commands from God: we wait for His calling, His guidance, His voice and His promise. In essence we wait for His plan and timing for our actions, as we are experiencing a great Mystery of a divine Triune God who communicates His love with humanity in His way and time.

His thoughts and ways that are not ours (Isaiah 55:8), which explains why the Cross remains “a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.” (1Cor 1:23) He is the origin and Maker of us but our tarnished human nature since the first fall prevents us from recognizing His full radiance. However, through His economy of salvation we have perceived His nature that is love, and throughout the human history and also our own experiences we are able to see that His love and guidance, His time and way are the only assurance for us to successfully and effectively live our lives to the fullest -- to live the Gospel and carry out His mission through which the true fulfillment of a human being is attained. Therefore, we need to wait, with patience and hope, for His commands and time.

However, waiting for God’s commands can be extremely difficult especially when one is under pressure. Biblical story tells us that Saul, the king of Israel waited seven days as the Prophet Samuel had instructed. But when Samuel did not arrive at the specified time, Saul, seeing his men slipping away while his enemy’s army is surmounting, went ahead to offer the holocaust for God’s blessing.

Overwhelmed by fear and anxiety, Saul couldn’t wait for Samuel any longer but resorted to take action on his own. But did he save himself in the end?

When Samuel showed up, he condemned Saul: “You have been foolish! Had you kept the command the Lord your God gave you, the Lord would now establish your kingship in Israel as lasting, but as things are, your kingdom shall not endure..., because you broke the Lord’s command. “ (cf. 1Samuel, 8-14) Indeed, Saul reigned two years over Israel. (1Samuel, 13:1)

By contrast, in the NT we see the perfect role model of waiting for God’s time in our Lord Jesus Christ. Always conscious and respectful of the Father’s timing, Jesus says, “My time has not come yet.” (Jn 7:6, 8) After the resurrection He appeared to the disciples and instructed them “to wait for the promise of the Father..., in a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” When asked by the disciples if he is going to restore the kingdom to Israel now, Jesus answered, “It is not for you to know the times or reasons that the Father has established by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth.” (cf. Act 1:1-8)

Our Lord is the God that keeps His promises in His timing and the first Christians did receive the Holy Spirit at the Pentecost that has brought about the birth of the Church. Among the seven sacraments mediated by the Church, through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation the Holy Spirit has bestowed in us the characters of becoming God’s children and His disciples. Indeed, we do not need to know, and actually could never fully grasp the reason and time for each individual action within God’s plan. However, we can confidently participate in His salvation through total trust and love. Therefore we shall wait with:

- The humility to curb our ego and eagerness to jump into our own decisions.
- A clear conscience and full alertness to see and hear God’s calling.
- The enduring patience, the unflinching belief that God will keep His promises.
- The determination to keep a cool head in the face of overwhelming difficulties, turning undivided attention to God who is on the way to help.
- An open heart and mind to discern for God’s initiatives, applying His wisdom rather than the worldly conventions.
- The great hope and joy that we’ve inherited from the first Christians.
- Preparation for our body and soul during the waiting: keep ourselves sanctified through charity and grace.

But most of all, let's follow the Holy Spirit and let it work in us, for He is giver of life, the guiding hand of God. Waiting patiently for God's commands is necessary and rewarding, even at the cost of suffering, pain and loss, for at the end of waiting we are rewarded with a renewed strength in our faith, restored vigor in our body, soul and character, rejuvenated spirit in family and community and a great joy of missions accomplished – we have pulled through the trials and tests to become closer to God.

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A failed Evangelization without Waiting for His time

Recently I was invited, or rather earnestly asked by my music pal to take a cruise along the Danube River, the cradle of classic music and the Great Waltz. My friend and I both play instrument and share the same zeal in opera and concert. However, recently she has been through a lot: her marriage is falling apart and her son has difficulties in learning and communication with parents. On top of it all her father had a stroke last month that left him paralyzed in the hospital in Shanghai.

Nevertheless she wanted to take this trip with me so that we'd have plenty time to talk about her current situation. I don't want to see her suffering alone while I do believe that no other way could pull her out from her misery except the way of a Christian life. She always marvels at the joy I have as a Christian, which encouraged me to think that this trip could turn out to be her conversion. I said yes to her initiation and even went to the bank to take a loan for the trip.

Once on board, we started talking about her constant suffering. But when I offered the insights from the Christian perspective, she kind of resisted without giving specific reason. I kept preaching the Christians' way of dealing with suffering and loss, and the consequent joy and peace we enjoy even in adversity. Finally she burst out: "Yang, take a look at the world history and you'll find Christianity caused wars and blood shedding, but Buddhism is peace and is never involved in wars."

This happened on the last two days of the trip which later turned out to be the intensive two days of heated debates. I desperately defended Christianity with my limited knowledge and insufficient presentation skills. Ironically and regrettably I didn't even have time to pray, let alone to discern for God's time and commands. I argued emotionally at the breakfast, lunch and dinner that Christianity by its nature could never be the cause of war, but human sinfulness is. For example, WWI and WWII are not religious wars but were launched by human evil ambition to conquer through violence. She begged me to stop but I felt the urgency to clarify her biased concept of Christianity before we got off the boat. In my apologetics I even stepped into the criticism of her inclined philosophy – Buddhism – and I didn't even apologize after realizing that. Even if what I said made sense, the mutual respect and the surface harmony were broken. She was silent and I was enthusiastic to pursue further explanations for what I regard as the great topics brought about from our on-going conversations of debate.

I regretted that I failed to bring her to Christianity: I did everything on my timing but not God's, and I used my instincts instead of waiting for God's wisdom. But nothing could be more humbling than what she said upon parting: "I thank you very much for accompanying me on this trip. I really appreciate your being with me."

With all my piety and strength for theological apologetics, I couldn't bring myself up to apologize to her for not being fully sympathetic for her sufferings, because her words hurt my religion. But now I see the grave reality once we said good-bye to each other: she had to fly a 14-hour flight to Shanghai to deal with her paralyzed father and ailing mother, not to mention her disobedient son and her husband who rarely shares the same interest with her. I realized that for the time being she just needs a friend to accompany and support her and it may not be her immediate need at this moment to listen to my preaching. I didn't take her need seriously but was overwhelmed by the seriousness of theological arguments. I am writing to her to apologize for not being considerate as I should and I will work on reestablishing the friendship with her. This time, I will wait for God's commands and His timing.



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門徒與忍耐等候

在福傳的旅程中，我們常為宣揚上主的福音而忙於去做各項大小事工。但是我們可能在途中停下數天或數年去等待上主的召叫、指引、聲音和承諾。而重要的是我們要按天主的計劃去行動，天主有著祂的時間和方法去在人間傳遞祂的愛，我們是不能完全明白的。

祂的思想和行徑不同我們（依 55:8），由此知道為何十字架上的基督會是猶太人的絆腳石，為外邦人是愚妄（格前 1:23）。天主是我們的創造者，但我們的原罪阻止我們去認知祂的光芒。但是透過基督的救贖我們認識天主是愛的本質，在人類的歷史中，我們亦體驗到天主的愛和指引，祂有著祂的時間和方式去引導我們達至成全的生命—活出福音和完成天主給我們的使命。因此我們要耐心和懷著希望地等待祂的旨意和時間。

當我們在壓力之下等待天主的旨意更是困難。以色列王撒烏耳的故事便是其中一個例子。撒烏耳按照撒慕爾約定的日期等了七天，但是撒慕爾卻沒有到，因此軍民離開撒烏耳四散逃跑了。在惶恐和不安的情況下，撒烏耳沒有等待撒慕爾前來便先行獻了全燔祭。但他最後有沒有得救呢？當撒慕爾來到時，他對撒烏耳說：「你作的真糊塗！假使你遵守了上主你的天主吩咐的命令，上主必鞏固你在以色列的王位直到永遠。但現在你的王位已立不住了；上主已另找了一位隨他心意的人，立他為百姓的首領，因為你沒有遵守上主吩咐你的命令。」（撒下 13:8-13）相反在新約聖經中，耶穌為我們立了好的榜樣，祂說：「我的時候還沒有到」（若 7:6）復活之後，祂向宗徒們現身並告訴他們：「你們要等候父的恩許……不多幾天以後，你們要因聖神受洗。」當宗徒問耶穌說：「主，是此時要給以色列復興國家嗎？」祂回答說：「父以自己的權柄所定的時候和日期，不是你們應當知道的；但當聖神降臨於你們身上時，你們將充滿聖神的德能，要在耶路撒冷及全猶太和撒瑪黎雅，並直到地極，為我作證人。」（宗 1:1-8）

我們的天主是會按祂的時間去實踐祂的應許和承諾的，而宗徒在五旬節領受聖神後確實帶領教會的誕生。在七件聖事當中，聖神透過聖洗和堅振聖事使我們成為天主的子女和門徒。確實我們不需要知道或永不可能完全知道每個人在天主計劃內的角色和時間。但我們可以透過愛和完全的信賴充滿地投入祂的救贖計劃當中。因此我們要懷著以下的心態去等待：

- ▶ 謙卑地依靠上主，在作決定時抑壓自我和渴望。
- ▶ 智慧地分辨和警覺去聆聽天主的召叫。
- ▶ 耐心忍耐，懷著信德，天主是會實踐祂的應許的。
- ▶ 在面對困難時仍保持清醒，轉向上主，祂正在幫助我們。
- ▶ 保持開放的心靈去迎接天主的旨意，天主的智慧是我們無法完全了解的。
- ▶ 要像宗徒們一樣，時常懷著盼望和喜樂。
- ▶ 時刻準備我們的身體和心靈，以感恩和慈愛去奉獻自己。

最重要的是跟隨聖神，讓祂在我們身上工作，因為祂賜予我們生命並為上主引導我們。忍耐地等候天主的旨意是必須和有賞報的，雖然其間我們經過各種的磨難、痛苦和損失。最終我們的賞報是豐厚的，經過考驗之後我們會更接近上主；信德更堅固；生命更豐盛；品格更崇高；家庭和社區和諧友愛；並因完成天主的使命獲得最大的喜樂。



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一個失敗的福傳經驗

董楊

最近一位我音樂上的朋友邀請我同行，一起乘坐郵輪暢遊古典音樂和華爾茲舞曲的搖籃多瑙河。這位朋友和我一樣演奏同樣的樂器，而且大家對歌劇和音樂會都有一樣的愛好。不幸地她最近有很多不如意的事情發生：她的婚姻破裂；兒子有學習困難和不和父母溝通，再加上她父親月前中風癱瘓，正在上海的醫院留醫。

無論如何，她想我同行散心。我不願看她獨個兒受苦和相信只有基督信仰才能讓她看到出路和解脫。我時常和她分享作為基督徒的喜樂，她都感到驚奇，所以我認為今次是向她傳教的好機會。我答應了她的邀請，雖然我要向銀行貸款支付旅費。

一上到船，我們便開始談論她的不幸遭遇。但每當我用基督徒的角度和她分析時，她總是拒絕而不說出原因。我還不斷地向她說教，說明基督徒在逆境中仍能得到平安和喜悅。最後她沖口而出的對我說：「董楊，你看看歷史基督宗教做成幾多的戰爭和殺戮，而佛教則是和平和沒有介入任何的戰爭當中。」

她是在旅程最後兩天說出的，令到我們在這兩天中為這話題展開了激烈的辯論。我當然用我有限的智識和表達技巧為我的宗教辯護，更後悔我沒有祈禱和清醒下來等待天主的旨意和時機。不論在早餐午餐和晚餐時，我都只是激動地爭辯基督宗教本身並沒有主張戰爭，只是人類罪惡使然，第一次和第二次世界大戰都不是宗教戰爭，都是由人類想征服全世界的邪惡念頭而引起

的。她求我停止爭論，但我還沒有停止，因為我想在上岸前糾正她對基督宗教的偏見。在我的辯證中，我還批評她的佛教哲學而沒有向她道歉。雖然我所說的可能有道理，但我們彼此間的尊重與和諧已經消失了。她保持沉默而我則繼續為這個題目而滔滔雄辯。

我後悔我不能令她入教，我只是用我個人的能力去傳教，沒有等待天主的智慧 and 時機。我的朋友在話別時還很謙虛的對我說：「多謝和感激我在旅程中陪伴她。」

因為她的說話傷害了我的宗教，在護教和論證中，我沒有關心她的困難和痛苦。但現在我感受到她和我告別之後，她又回到殘酷的現實中，她要坐十四小時的飛機去探望癱瘓在醫院的父親和安慰她的母親，還要面對與她不和的丈夫和兒子。我現在了解到她只是需要別人陪伴和支持，不是聽我的證道。我沒有認真的顧及她的需要反而投入哲理的辯論中。我現正和她通訊向她道歉並希望重新建立我們的友誼。今次，我會等待天主的旨意和時機了。

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