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On Waiting

by MELANNIE SVOBODA SND on NOVEMBER 26, 2012

Most of us don't like to wait. We grow impatient waiting for the traffic light to change, the coffee to brew, the water to boil for the pasta. We glance at our watches as we stand in the checkout line, sit in a doctor's office, or wait for an elderly person to get to the point of her long and convoluted story.

Why is waiting so hard for us? For one thing, we are busy people. Demands come at us from all sides—from family, friends, work, church. All the time-saving devices we've invented and use every day don't seem to save us any time. Or if they do, we just cram more and more activities and projects into the time that we have. As a writer, for example, I know the computer has made my writing immensely easier. When I recall the electric-typewriter-and-carbon-paper days, I wonder how I ever produced anything. But because of the convenience of the computer I sometimes put greater demands upon myself to produce more and more!

Our busyness has given rise to a rather new phenomenon known as multitasking. I personally wish the word had never been invented. Multitasking means instead of focusing on doing one thing at a time, we are expected to do two, three, or even more things all at once. When I pick up my order from a fast food place, for example, I notice the person at the window is talking. But she is not talking to me. She's taking the order of the person three cars behind me! And while she's taking their order, she's getting my drink, making my change, and handing me my food—all at the same time!

But another reason we have a hard time with waiting goes deeper than our busyness. When we wait we are not in control. Whatever we are waiting for is out of our hands, whether we're waiting for a letter to come, a baby to be born, an illness to pass, spring to arrive, or even a loved one to die. At such times we know we are at the mercy of

About Sister Melannie Svoboda, SND

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Each Monday I'll post a short reflection, a simple musing on some aspect of spirituality—the everyday kind of spirituality that



includes things like walking in the park, slicing an onion for the casserole, caring for a child, studying for an exam, reading a line from scripture, laughing at a joke, or mourning a significant loss.

Along the way I welcome your questions, comments and insights too. After all, we're all in this life—this spiritual life—together!

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factors that are beyond our control. And that can be hard for us. Maybe that's why Richard Rohr wrote, "Suffering is when you are not in control."

But I believe this is precisely why waiting can be good for us and our spiritual life. It reminds us that despite our science, technology, medicine, creativity, and intelligence we must at times yield to forces that are greater than we are. At times we must let go of our incessant need to do—and just sit and wait. We Christians have an advantage in this regard, for we believe ultimately our lives are not in the hands of blind or malevolent forces, but in the hands of a God who loves us more than we can imagine.

So the next time you're waiting for something, tell yourself, "Okay, I'm not in control." Then smile and say to yourself, "But I know ultimately Who is!"

Do you find it hard to wait? Why?

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Chris Keil November 27, 2012 at 10:04 am



I find it easier to wait as I get older. Not sure why, but it seems that there's no point in rushing and getting all stressed about being in a hurry. If I'm late, then I'm late, what's going to happen? Probably nothing. Maybe as we age and grow in wisdom and maturity, we realize that all the rushing and hurrying doesn't really make a difference in the scheme of things.

If waiting means we're out of control, then I suggest we build in something to do when we're waiting so we can "take back control" of the situation. Maybe say a small prayer, thank God for the opportunity we are in at the moment, smile at the checkout clerk, check your email, play a game, or read something on your smart phone. I think it's best to try to appreciate and enjoy the situation we are in at the time.

Another gifted author once wrote: "We spend so much of our time wanting things

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to be better and different that we fail to see our real gifts. There are banquets in our life and we don't enjoy them because we are always grasping for something more: the perfect schedule, the perfect work, the perfect friend, etc. We have to realize that God's gifts are all around us, that our life is basically good." Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND November 29, 2012 at 9:35 am 

Dear Chris, I'm like you: hoping to grow in wisdom and maturity as I age! Thank you for your examples and the great quote by John Chittister, OSB. I hope I am able to appreciate all those "banquets" in my life the older I get. Thanks again for your wise words! Melannie

REPLY

Joan Campagna November 27, 2012 at 10:21 pm 

Without my smart phone I would say I had a difficult time just "waiting" with nothing else to do. As Sr Joan said, there are many things you can do while waiting now.....check your email, check the stock market, check for texts, or even use the phone to actually make a phone call. The hard part is simply waiting or not cluttering your mind with all the other aforementioned clutter!

As a hospice nurse, many times I just sit at my patient's bedside when they are dying. Nothing to do but wait, and talk to the family if they are actually there. Unfortunately many times it is myself and another member of the hospice team, and no family. I hope this doesn't sound strange, but these are some of my most peaceful times. The person's job on earth is completed, and whatever they believe of the after life is right around the corner for them.

Thanks for reminding me to stop.....WAIT.....and be peaceful!

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND November 29, 2012 at 9:32 am 

Dear Joan, You make a good point about how we can so easily fill every "waiting time" with a specific task. I'm sure your work with the dying gives you a wise perspective on living. Thanks for sharing! Melannie

REPLY

Dion November 28, 2012 at 9:54 am



I have come to appreciate more and more that the only moment I have is NOW so why not live in it! It is where God is. Thanks for your reflection.

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND November 29, 2012 at 9:29 am



Yes, how precious is each NOW. I like the quote: "Reality is God's home address." We could add, "So is every NOW." Thanks, Dion! Melannie

REPLY

Mary Beth November 30, 2012 at 8:38 pm



Everytime I feel a bit of stress coming on I say I am exactly where I am suppose to be and I feel relaxed and not stressed.

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND December 4, 2012 at 2:25 pm



Yes, we really have to center ourselves at times. Your way is a good one, Mary Beth. Thank you! Melannie

REPLY

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