



Seasons of Growth

In sharing about the season of struggling and healing that I have been experiencing, my spiritual director recently asked me this question. “Emma, are you treating this season as a “test” from the Lord or as an opportunity to grow closer to Him?”

I was stunned, shocked, and speechless, because in that moment I realized she was absolutely right.

Taking a good look at the state of my heart and my relationship with Jesus the next day in Adoration at my parish, I realized some things. I was indeed living each day of this new struggle and suffering as if it was a long obstacle course race set out for me by Jesus to test my strength. I saw Him standing on the sidelines with a stopwatch in hand, encouraging me to keep fighting, but watching how I dealt with each obstacle and barrier put in way. The other problem with treating this inner suffering as a “test” is that I was falling into the mentality that “it is only a test” and soon it will end. Soon I will never have to do this again. Soon I will never have to suffer again.

How easy it is to lean into the “prosperity gospel” understanding; that Jesus takes all the hurt and pain away in this life when the “test” is over. As I sat in Adoration and looked up towards the crucified Jesus on the Cross, His suffering said otherwise. His ragged breaths on the Cross, His mutilated body and bloodied figure speak of the fruit that true suffering produces: love and redemption.

We know and believe that as Christians, Jesus’ sacrifice and patience by which He endured His cross was of infinite value. By allowing His Son to suffer unimaginable pain and death, God the Father was bringing about a greater good for all of humanity because of His love for us.

Imagine if we looked at our crosses in this way. To throw ourselves at the feet of Jesus in the midst of our sufferings and say, like Jesus did in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.” (Mt. 26:39). But how do we live that level of surrender and abandonment when faced with our crosses? How can I desire the greater good in the midst of suffering?

As usual, the Father speaks to me through parables and metaphors, and so, as I pondered that question of abandonment, I found myself in the parable of the weeds among the wheat.

Sparknotes version: The Master sowed good seeds in the field, and at night the enemy came and sowed weeds in with the good seed. The next day the servants tell the Master of the enemy's evil work and logically suggest that to save the good seed, they should uproot the weeds. Makes sense, right? But the Master says "No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest." (Mt. 3:30).

In the Master's wisdom, He knew that in order for the wheat to reach its greatest growth, patience was required. It would do more harm to remove the weeds before the harvest, and the Master would not risk that for the wheat. He also knew that the weeds would not choke or harm the wheat while it was growing. The Master was sure of that. And at the Harvest, the weeds would be burned and the wheat brought home into the Master barn.

We are the wheat, and our suffering, the weeds. The enemy sneaks in to place obstacles and trials in our growth, but the Master allows it because He has a greater end in mind. He knows that these struggles will not choke us, and will not harm us. He has planted us in good soil, He is sure of the work of His hands. He asks us but one thing, that we trust in His plan, that we not "wait it out" for the end but rather learn to endure the "weeds" in our life with patience and faith. Jesus permits these trials for greater growth in our lives, so that we will grow closer to Him. To empty ourselves of all self-reliance to realize and say simply "Jesus, I need You". Because the greater good is, simply, Jesus Himself.

Jesus, today we lay down all fear, all doubt, all anger and resentment at the foot of your cross. We offer to you our struggles and trials that we don't understand and our desire for control when things feel overwhelming and out of control.

Jesus, we want what you want. Give us YOUR strength, YOUR peace, YOUR hope, YOUR patience and YOUR love to endure our crosses.

Jesus, we need You.

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