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MARY BERRY

A second helping
of my best ever
festive recipes

Irish Daily Mail

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

Good things come if you learn to wait

WHY is waiting such a burden? It wasn't always so, but it has become something which we seemingly cannot bear. The phrase 'I cannot wait' used to signify excitement, but today it signifies an unwillingness to anticipate what is to come.

In this age of instant gratification, when every desire is immediately fulfilled, the very idea of waiting is denied. Why wait when you can simply press a button and have your yearnings satisfied? Why wait when the answer to any need is at your fingertips?

Waiting is directly related to that other great virtue of patience. We plant the seed and wait for it to grow. Natural growth is something that requires patience, something that cannot be rushed.

A person, a plant or a crop grows in its own time. My son occasionally declares: 'I cannot wait until I am the age when I can drive!' But wait he must, for the years move at their own speed.

We cannot rush time, the seasons or the speed at which our planet moves. All things in the heavens and on Earth move to a natural cycle that doesn't speed up or slow down. Its pace is constant and certain.

To move at such a balanced pace is the secret to health, happiness and harmony. That is why, when we lived according to the seasons, our world was far less stressed. We knew that the leaves would fall in autumn and the buds would bloom in spring.

Now that we are so preoccupied with speed, we have lost that natural sense of balance. We have become impatient with patience, thus refusing to 'waste time' by waiting. Hence the transition from 'snail mail' to email to text.

We desire instant communication, fast food and 'same-day delivery'. We become irritated when we are forced to queue or wait in line. We simply cannot wait.

At Advent, we wait for what cannot be rushed. We wait for new light to come into the world and for a baby to be born. And yes, we even wait for the sound of sleigh bells on Christmas Eve.

We cannot rush Christmas and yet we never seem more rushed. The shops and streets are teeming with people running here and there. At the very time when we are invited to wait and to practise patience, we drive ourselves into the ground.

We constantly count the remaining shopping days. Each morning, our children count how many sleeps are left until the big day. It seems we go into a panic when we have to wait.

The child in the womb will not be

hurried. It will always come in its own time. We wait expectantly for the big arrival and, when the hour is right, our hopes shall be satisfied.

The great irony is that Advent is there to keep us watchful, to teach us patience and to give us ample time to prepare. The terrible consequences of ignoring it are palpably obvious. In the weeks leading up to Christmas, we live on a diet of stress and fatigue, as if time were not at our disposal.

It is wonderful to see how children buck that trend. For most of the year, they are used to getting what they want. Now, however, they must wait, and as they do so, a glorious excitement wells up within them.

They can tell you how many minutes it is until Christmas, and yet they know they still must wait. Indeed, it is the waiting, the hoping and yearning that makes it all so magical. With patience, they learn that when desires are instantly satisfied, disappointment inevitably follows.

Waiting puts limits on our appetites, cravings and instincts. We resist the urge to consume what we see when we see it. We exercise restraint, thus opting for balance over excess.

In waiting, we do not waste time. If anything, we take our time and, in so doing, find that everything happens in its own good time. Or, as St Teresa puts it: 'Patient endurance attains to all things.'

There is a beautiful Jewish tradition of filling a cup of wine for the Prophet Elijah at the Passover Table. The Jews do not demand that Elijah come to the meal, but hope that he may show up one day. The cup symbolises their readiness to greet the guest should he arrive.

THEY wait without disappointment, even as the wine remains untouched. They wait, not only for Elijah, but for anyone who may come seeking hospitality. They stay awake, for they neither know the day nor the hour when the visitor will knock.

As it happens, we do know the time when Advent will end and when the great feast shall begin. So why all the stress, the mayhem and the havoc? Why can't we pace ourselves for something that happens at the same time every year?

We wait in hope, for we know that everything has its due season. It is only when we refuse to wait, when we force things to come before their time, that life descends into chaos.

We wait in faith, for we know that Advent lasts but a month before we enjoy new light and new life. In our age of immediacy, a month may seem like an eternity, but it is worth the wait if only to see the excitement build in our children.

We wait in love because, with patience, the cup of wine does not remain full for long.