

# The Marshmallow Test

*Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. 'But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father –Mt 24:34-36*

Our entire faith rests on the promise that-though following the way of Christ takes perseverance- whoever endures will live a better life now, and an even better life to come. For some mysterious reason, the good life, heaven, even God is not available to us on demand, we have to trust and wait and discern them. This wisdom of delayed gratification is a key lesson in the school of our faith, so desperately needed today in our society of instant gratification, where everything is available on demand.

Not long ago, people used to have wait more. You had to wait to receive a letter from a loved one. You had to wait to meet friends somewhere, because you didn't have instant updates where they were. You had to wait till the newspaper came to get the news. We used to have to wait a lot more for things, and people didn't see that as a problem, but a virtue; that delayed gratification and patience built character. There was even a fascinating experiment to prove it. Has anyone ever heard of the marshmallow test? It sounds like a test any of us would love to take! But this is a real research test first run at Stanford University in the 1960s. In the experiment, a researcher gives this choice to a 4-year-old: "I am leaving for a few minutes to run an errand and you can have this marshmallow while I am gone, but if you wait until I return, you can have two marshmallows." Some kids went for the one and others waited for two. Well it turns out that when they evaluated these kids years after, those who waited did markedly better in life than those who didn't; better grades, less trouble and even higher SATs. This study suggests what we all know, that delayed gratification has many benefits.

But it is increasingly harder in today's society to delay our gratification. Today, if our kids were left in a room wanting marshmallows, they'd yell for Alexa to tell amazon to ship a crate full by day's end! With our screens and devices, we can see and know anything we want at any time, is it even possible to have faith in things not seen and not yet? Through social media we are constantly connected with the trivia of people's lives, is it even possible to disconnect from the trivia long enough for a deeper connection to grow? What happens to relationships with others and with God, when we can get anything we want, when we want it?

Despite all the negative consequences, I don't believe that the trappings of the digital age are bad in themselves, they are only bad when they knock our lives out of balance. Thankfully, our church, our community and our scriptures help us regain balance by constantly reinforcing the importance of delayed gratification; wisdom that can enrich all our relationships and endeavors in this life unto the next.

Today's Gospel reading is an excellent example. In it Jesus reminds us that God's plan is already decided, but He will allow it to unfold in due time. You could say that our entire relationship with God is something of a marshmallow test. God has created everything there is, the heavens and earth and everything within, and then created us to partake of it. This life, God's creation is the first marshmallow if you will, it was given to us and we are meant to enjoy it, but we have always been told that a much greater gift is coming. So if we eat the pleasure of this life up as fast as we can, hoard and defend it from others, this will be all we enjoy. But if we can hold off, be patient, offer what we have been given back to others and to God, we will not only better enjoy the gift of this life, but prepare ourselves for God's promise of abundant life, which is not lacking in any way. The stakes of this test with God are infinitely higher than marshmallows; at stake is an outlook on life which trickles down to all of our important relationships. Do we live a closed and defensive life of scarcity where there is never enough, or a large and open life of abundance, trusting that the Lord will always provide.

We might wonder why God has set things up in this way. Why would our heavenly father allow us to be tested in this way; where we hunger and desire to be instantly filled, but can never be fulfilled in the here and now. Perhaps it is because, like any good Father, our Lord does not wish us to fill up on passing pleasures, so many marshmallows filled with air, when we might grow up to partake of much greater things. Perhaps he withholds the good, withholds himself,

so that we will grow into the good. For what we can't yet see and have, helps us grow in patience and trust. And what we can't yet grasp, allows us to be grasped by God...who promises us joy and love greater than we can imagine at the coming fulfillment of his promise, now and always and unto the ages of ages, amen.