

Landry: What perseverance can do

The hardest part of learning to play the guitar is about the first three weeks or so. With about fifteen or twenty minutes of practice each day, this is the amount of time it takes to build up callouses on the pads of your fingertips. Building callouses is painful, and online classified ads are filled with the guitars from people who made it a week or two... but gave up just before their callouses got thick enough to make playing enjoyable.

A few weeks ago, we celebrated the feast of St. Mary Magdalene, and I was reminded of this when I read the following from St. Gregory the Great in the office of readings:

"The (Gospel) then says: The disciples went back home, and it adds: but Mary wept and remained standing outside the tomb. We should reflect on Mary's attitude and the great love she felt for Christ; for though the disciples had left the tomb, she remained... and so it happened that the woman who stayed behind to seek Christ was the only one to see Him. For perseverance is essential to any good deed, as the voice of truth tells us: Whoever perseveres to the end will be saved." – St. Gregory the Great

Perseverance is a virtue that is recognized in both secular and sacred realms alike. In much the same way as perseverance is the difference between learning to play guitar or not, it's also a critical virtue for anyone undertaking a new fitness regimen.

Whether it's the building of muscle or the burning of calories, it's often that extra lap, one more repetition, or a couple more minutes of cardio that help you really start to see the difference.

Perseverance is also key virtue in the spiritual life. In his "degrees of perfection", St. John of the Cross challenges us to "Never give up prayer, and should you find dryness and difficulty, persevere in it for this very reason. God often desires to see what love your soul has, and love is not tried by ease and satisfaction."

It's notable that John of the Cross ties perseverance to love.

In the weeks leading up to my wedding, I remember sitting at daily Mass a few rows behind a wonderful couple, Gabriel & Christine, who at that time had been married for sixty years.

It occurred to me that although my fiancé and I might show more of the sentiments surrounding love, we were just beginning to learn about love in a

way that they were already masters. I spent some time pondering the signs of age that both bore on their faces and hands, and it seemed to me that every crease was a sign of the sacrifices each one had made for the other over their years of marriage.

You can imagine thousands of occasions where each one was asked to put the others' needs ahead of their own, doing the daily tasks of maintaining a household, sleepless nights spent with a newborn or a sick child, time spent away from home and family due to work, and so on. I still consider myself an apprentice in the class in which they were masters – because their perseverance demonstrated specifically the love which their souls bore.

Understanding love in this way gives new meaning to Jesus' challenge that we not only love when it's easy, but that we should also be willing to go an extra mile for the sake of others (*Matthew 5:41*).

When I've been involved in marriage preparation, I've looked back on that period of my engagement as a perfect example of what perseverance can do.

On the one hand, planning a wedding introduces you to many of the skills that makes a marriage like Gabriel & Christine's possible: you have to learn to listen to the hopes of your fiancé, to compromise, and to see the reward that's coming at the end of all of your work. Also, one's dedication to chastity is greatly tested in those last months before marriage – but perseverance in this area helps one to remain faithful to your spouse when difficulties and temptations arrive in your marriage.

But if you look again at the above quote from St. John of the Cross, he was speaking specifically about perseverance in *prayer*.

Our need to persevere in prayer is reflected in that section of the Catechism that [describes prayer as a battle](#). Any hard-fought victory requires perseverance – and prayer is no different.

You might consider that the grace of a period of prayer is often found in that last minute or two spent in prayer. If we can appreciate the need to not cheat on a workout, we should also appreciate the need to complete our moments of prayer. If we say we're going to give the Lord fifteen minutes – we need to give Him all fifteen minutes, pray that fifth mystery of the Rosary, and read all the way to the end of whatever Chapter in Scripture we're intending to read.

The reason for this is a lot more important than just figuring out how to play the guitar: we shouldn't want to miss out on any moment of grace that the Lord offers us.

*Grant me, O Lord my God, a mind to know you, a heart to seek you,
wisdom to find you, conduct pleasing to you, faithful perseverance in*

*waiting for you, and a hope of finally embracing you. Amen. – St.
Thomas Aquinas*