

**IV EASTER 2014**  
**SERMON - CHRIST CHURCH PARISH**  
**FATHER CRAIG LOONEY**  
**ST. JAMES 1.17 ST. JOHN 16.5**

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Good gifts and perfect presents are God's specialty. He gives them to us freely and out of his unconditional love for us. His good gifts and perfect presents benefit us when we open them up and put them to good use. It's our job as responsible, mature, Christians, to try to recognize the good gifts and perfect presents he gives us, and then proceed to use them wisely.

*Every good gift and every perfect present comes down from heaven; it comes down from God the Creator of the heavenly lights, who does not change or cause darkness by turning. (St. James 1.17)*

We have often talked about Paul's famous letter to the Corinthians in which he writes the three greatest gifts God has given to each of us in abundance are Faith, Hope and Love. The greatest of the three gifts is Love, because Love never dies and our hearts must always be motivated by the same kind of selfless Love that motivated Jesus.

The Epistle readings for this week and next week are from James and they are all about hearing and doing. James is intense in his conviction and teaching that is not enough to say we love God and have Faith in Jesus Christ. We must be willing to put our Faith into practice. We must show love. Faith and Love are living things to be acted upon every day of our lives.

James would later write a Faith that is not acted upon is like a cold, dead, corpse...lifeless...without any breath. Faith is not only about reading the words of the Bible and listening to the lessons we hear read at Mass. It's about taking what we read and hear and translating it into good and positive actions of love both in word and deed.

The good thing is God also gave us the Gift of His Holy Spirit to help us recognize the good gifts and perfect presents he has given us and who helps us figure out the best way to use them. James tells us we have the "word of truth" planted in our hearts. When we were baptized, we received God's gift of the Holy Spirit, and our lives were changed forever. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us the strength to keep our Faith alive, healthy, and strong.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples not to be upset because he told them he is getting ready to leave them. He tells them to calm down, because when he returns to the Father, he will send a Special Gift, the Comforter, who will reveal to them the truth about his mission to reconcile the world to the Father. The strength they will receive from the Comforter will make them quickly forget whatever sadness they felt when he returned to the Father in heaven.

Jesus said the Comforter...the Helper...will lead us into all truth and make everything clear to us. He will help us to say and do the right things. The power of the Holy Spirit enables us, as the Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent tells us, to "hear, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest" the words of Scripture. And it is the Holy Spirit who empowers us to turn those words into right thoughts and right actions.

James gives us some practical advice on how people who possess God's good gifts and perfect presents should act. He tells us to be "quick to listen, but slow to speak and slow to become angry". That means we should think before saying anything we might regret having said later. We want to always say and do the right things. Unchecked anger makes that impossible and can lead to outright hatred.

We are called to be God's people...the community of believers called to be his Church...and that means we are also called to conduct ourselves accordingly. James encourages us to always try to avoid attitudes and behaviors that are unhealthy and self-destructive and lead us away from what God the Father wants for us...which is for us to enjoy his good gifts and perfect presents to the fullest.

Finally, when James tells us to submit to God he does not mean blind submission! He means that when we accept the word of truth planted in our hearts, we become active participants in God's plan for salvation and our Faith grows and remains vibrant and alive.

Let us ask God to increase the Holy Spirit in our lives so we may see the good gifts and perfect presents he has given us for what they truly are and then to use them wisely.

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