

IV EASTER 2016

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

ST. JAMES 1.17 ST. JOHN 16.5

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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)

God gives us good gifts and perfect presents because he loves us and wants what is best for us. He does not know how to give bad gifts or imperfect presents.

The greatest gift God gives us is the freedom to love others as much as he loves us. The most perfect present we have received from him is the Holy Spirit who empowers and enriches our lives so we are able to use the freedom to love others properly.

The Epistle readings for this week and next week are from James and they are all about hearing and doing. If they seem familiar it is because together they make up the Epistle reading for Thanksgiving Day...so we will hear them again in about seven months. The connection will become clearer next Sunday...Rogation Sunday.

James is concerned about HOW we hear the words of Scripture...that we are properly disposed to hearing the Good News about Jesus. He tells us to be "quick to listen, but slow to speak and slow to become angry"... think before we say something we might regret later. Unchecked anger is only a breath away from outright hatred.

But for James coming to Mass and hearing the words of Scripture read is not enough. He says we have the "word of truth" planted in our hearts. That planting which we received at our baptism must lead us into doing good works.

James is a man who believed very intensely that people who claim to be religious...to have faith...but are unwilling to carry that faith over into positive actions of love in word or deed...are fooling themselves. If we say we have faith but are not willing to act on our faith...it is meaningless...it is cold and dead...not alive. Our faith must be active and alive and dynamic.

The disciples were happy because they saw a Jesus who was alive and dynamic after the Resurrection. They are confused and upset when he tells them repeatedly he will only be with them for a while longer because he is going back to the Father who sent him. Jesus tells them not to worry...they will soon get help and strength to carry on in their work. So they should not be sad...they should be happy.

We should be happy too. The God who created everything only knows how to give good gifts and perfect presents. He does not change his mind and does not turn his back on us leaving us in darkness. He loves us, he sent Jesus to save us and for the next two weeks leading to Rogationtide we will prepare ourselves for his departure on Ascension Day, and for receiving God's most perfect gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

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 the perfect presents to the fullest.

James tells us to submit to God. He does not mean blind submission without purpose! He means when we accept the "word of truth" planted in our hearts, we become active and dynamic participants in God's plan for salvation and our faith matures 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. And let us remember James' own words...

...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.

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