

V EASTER 2017 (ROGATION SUNDAY)

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

ST. JAMES 1.22 ST. JOHN 16.23

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Every good gift and every perfect present comes from heaven...Saint James tells us...they come down from God...the Creator of heavenly lights...and he doesn't change his pattern of giving...he is not like a shifting shadow.

We tend to use the words *gift* and *present* interchangeably...we think of them as having the same meaning...something that is given or presented without expectation of anything in return.

There is a subtle difference...students of the language will tell us a *present* describes something tangible...like a birthday present we receive. A *gift* is far more valuable...something we could call a special gift or talent we receive from God.

Saint James would tell us God is the source of both the tangible and spiritual gifts and presents we have...everything we have comes from God...and it's not enough to just talk about our gifts and presents...God expects us to put them to good use. There is no excuse in God's mind for laziness or complacency.

We are still in the Easter Season. Easter is about the Resurrection of Jesus and the hope it offers for our own resurrections to eternal life. Easter is God's good gift and perfect present to us...to take full advantage of Easter...we need to live it every day of our lives.

The three days preceding the Ascension Day, which is this coming Thursday, are called the Rogation Days. The Fifth Sunday after Easter...Rogation Sunday...takes its name from the Rogation Days. They form a short transitional season leading us toward the Ascension Day and the Great Feast of Pentecost.

The word *rogation* comes from the Latin verb *rogare*...meaning *to ask*. The Rogation Days held special meaning in Europe...they were originally days of prayer and fasting for the protection of nations and the blessing of crops planted in the Spring and for a plentiful harvest in the Fall...more gifts and presents from God.

Last week Saint James planted in our minds and hearts the idea every good gift and every perfect present comes from God...he is the source of everything. This week he tell us to take action...don't just listen to the Good News...make it our life's work...take action...help others...don't just give God lip service.

The Collect for Purity said at the beginning of every Mass reminds us God sees what's in our hearts at all times and in all places. He is most concerned about the disposition of our hearts to always do the right thing. It is not possible to play hide-and-seek with God...he always finds us.

When we look in a mirror...as James tells us... we only see a reflection of who we are...not the real us...we don't see our hearts...God does! If we are satisfied with our reflection in the mirror...and are tempted to walk away thinking we are good and religious people...but criticize others at the first opportunity that comes our way...we are deceiving ourselves...and God sees that too!

If we want to impress God we need to take to heart what James calls "pure and genuine religion...to take care of orphans and widows in their suffering...and to keep ourselves from being corrupted by the world". It's not enough...in fact it's meaningless...to hear we are God's people and say we are his...without acting the part. In plain language...we are obligated to do the right thing...at all times...for everyone!

That sounds like a tall order...and it is...but it isn't one we can shy away from. We don't have to. Jesus promised to send us a Holy Helper so we don't have to try to figure things out by ourselves. He promised he would not leave us alone.

Rogationtide is about asking God to increase in us those good gifts and perfect presents we acknowledge come from him...and to always think and do the right things. Along the way it should not surprise us if our commitment to doing what is right at all times runs counter to what much of the world thinks is right.

Let's remember what Jesus tells us, "The world will make you suffer. But be brave! I have defeated the world!"

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