

IV EASTER 2019

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

ST. JAMES 1.17-21 ST. JOHN 16.5-15

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Our friends deserve the best. It can be a challenge finding the perfect gift for them. We want it to be just the right thing. We give it with love and we hope our friends know how much we love them when they open the package.

Think about how we felt when we received a Christmas or Birthday gift that exceeded our wildest expectations...it was more than a good gift...it was the perfect present!

In today's Epistle reading...James tells us every good gift and perfect present comes from God. God created everything and called it good...he only gives us good gifts and perfect presents...it isn't in his nature to give bad gifts and imperfect presents. Everything we have...is a gift from God!

The good gift and perfect present James is talking about is God's Word...Holy Scripture. James is firm in his conviction and teaching that it's not enough to just hear God's Word...we must act upon what we hear. Our faith must be dynamic and reach out from our hearts. James also tells us a faith that isn't acted upon is cold and lifeless.

When our friends gave us that best gift and perfect present...we get the most out of the gift when we use it for its intended purpose. God gives us many good gifts and perfect presents during our lifetime...sometimes we need help recognizing just how good and perfect they are...and sometimes we need help to know how to put them to good use.

God empowers us with his Holy Spirit to help us recognize the good gifts and perfect presents he has given us and figure out the best way to use them. James tells us we have the "word of truth" grafted (planted) in our hearts.

Grafting is a technique in horticulture of joining tissue from one plant to another...binding the two plants together hoping they will grow as a single plant and thrive. It's the Holy Spirit who we ask God to grow in us daily to strengthen us and keep our faith alive, healthy, strong and active.

Before Jesus returned to heaven at the Ascension...he promised his friends he would send them a Special Gift...a Special Helper he called the Comforter...*Paracletus* in Greek. Jesus is talking about the Holy Spirit. *Paracletus* also means counselor, advocate and strengthener. Jesus said God's Holy Helper, will reveal the truth about his mission to reconcile the world to the Father.

Jesus said the Comforter...the Helper...will lead us into all truth and make everything clear to us. He will help us say and do the right things. The right things James talks about in the Epistle. We should listen to what people say to us and not be so quick to react or get angry. We should avoid attitudes and actions that are unhealthy. We want the Holy Spirit planted in our hearts to help us grow in thought, word and action.

Most of us easily identify with the Father who created us and the Son who redeemed us. We need to remember the Holy Spirit isn't a thing...he is the Third Person of the Trinity. It is the Holy Spirit who 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 tells us to submit to God. He doesn't mean blind submission out of fear God's going to get us if we don't. He means God wants us to give ourselves to him freely...admitting he really knows what he's doing and what's best for us. He means that when we accept the word of truth God has planted in our hearts, we become active participants in his plan for salvation and our Faith grows and remains vibrant and alive.

Let's thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit we will soon celebrate at Pentecost. Let's remember what the bishop said at our Confirmations. He asked God to give us his grace because we are his children...he prayed we will be his forever...he prayed the Holy Spirit will increase in us daily...until we come into his everlasting kingdom.

Good gifts and perfect presents are God's specialty. Let's ask him for the wisdom and strength to put them to good use.

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