

IV EASTER 2021

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

ST. JAMES 1.1-21 ST. JOHN 16.5-15



Gifts and presents...we give them to family and friends because we love them...they give them to us for the same reason. Sometimes we look for that perfect present to give someone...for a birthday, a graduation, Christmas, or to say, “job well done.”

Last Sunday in the Epistle from Ephesians appointed for Saint Mark’s Day, our friend Saint Paul had some things to say about gifts. First...we all possess the singular gift of the Holy Spirit...which is the Holy Spirit himself. Second...we have other gifts when used according to God’s will...they build up the Church.

The Epistle readings for this week and next week are from Saint James...and he also has a lot to say about gifts...and how we respond to those gifts. All good gifts and perfect presents come from God...he tells us. Every gift God gives us is good...every present he gives us is perfect. He is incapable of giving us bad gifts and imperfect presents...it’s against his nature.

Whatever gifts God gives us not only help us build up the Church...they help us in our work outside the Church. We are the Church...the Body of Christ. We exist as the Body of Christ all of our lives...not just for one hour on Sunday morning.

Some of us are teachers, lawyers, medical professionals, civic leaders and priests. We want to do our work well...and remain firm in our faith...even when we find ourselves confronted by what the Collect calls “The sundry and manifold changes of the world.”

James is intense in his conviction we act upon the gifts God has given us...it isn’t enough to say we love God and have Faith in Jesus Christ. We must be willing to practice what we preach. We must show our Faith through unconditional acts of love. We will hear more about what James has to say about Faith in Action next week...stay tuned!

In the Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples he is getting ready to leave them. He tells them not to worry...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...the Holy Spirit...will lead us into all truth and make everything clear to us. The Holy Spirit empowers us, as the Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent reminds us, to “hear, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest” the words of Scripture. And it is the Holy Spirit who empowers us to turn what we read and hear from Holy Scripture...into right thoughts, right words and right actions.

Let’s return to the Epistle for a moment. Saint 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.

Because we have God’s good gifts and perfect presents in our lives...Saint James tells us...we must act like mature Christians. He tells us to be “quick to listen, but slow to speak and slow to become angry”. In other words...think before we speak. We all heard the children’s rhyme “Sticks and Stones”. Words can be harmful...left unchecked can lead to anger and outright hatred.

All of this talk about good gifts and perfect presents is leading up to something...the next two big Liturgical celebrations in the life of the Church around the World and of Saint Joseph Parish...the Ascension Day and Pentecost. We’re getting ready to receive God’s gift of the Holy Spirit Jesus said he would send our way, to help us do our work.

Next Sunday...Rogation Sunday...we will bless the seeds the pre-school children have planted in our Saint Francis Garden. We will ask God to give them the right amount of sun and rain to grow into healthy crops.

God has given all of us good gifts and perfect presents...not because he has to...because he wants to...they are an expression of his love...and he wants us to enjoy them to the fullest.

